

An
Architecture
of
Intimate Encounter

Plotting the Raffles Hotel through Flora and Fauna
(1887-1925, 1987-2005)

This thesis is submitted to the University of London in partial fulfillment of the degree of
PhD in Architecture

by
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Li Lian Chee

June 2006

London

Abstract

This thesis reconstitutes the ‘architectural subject’ by placing the intimate encounter between the experiencing subject and the architectural object as central to the architecture of the Raffles Hotel, a well-known colonial monument in Singapore.

By expanding Julia Kristeva’s notion of ‘the semiotic’ through the context of feminist architectural theory, this thesis theorizes the original concept of an architecture based on intimate encounter – a method, which emphasizes the agency of the experiencing subject and relational modes of architectural interpretation. The intimate encounter may be broadly surmised by three key aspects – the relational role of the experiencing subject, the construction of architectural histories and theories through a chronologically complex spatial armature, and interpretations of the intimate detail, an object central to the experiencing subject’s architectural experience. Working through academic methodologies, historical-theoretical speculations and performative textual strategies, the investigation combines modes of historical, theoretical and inventive architectural interpretation and production.

The hotel’s two key spaces – the Palm Court and the Billiard Room – are interpreted through their floral and animal ‘plots’, that is, architectural concepts based on metonymical and metaphorical relationships. Although the investigation through flora and fauna relates to a ‘tropical’ situation, this methodology ultimately critiques prevalent regionalist architectural discourses common to the hotel’s geographical context.

This research has five main objectives. It develops a theoretical framework that critically accounts for subject positions outside those of the architect's. It expands the repertoire of evidence relevant to architectural research. It employs modes of interpretation and writing, which draw on knowledge and techniques from architectural theory, history and criticism, feminist and literary theories, and philosophical ideas. It suggests that architectural history and theory is an imaginative spatial enterprise involving diverse times, spaces and subjects. Finally, it innovates a creative architectural typology for the hotel, based on its floral and animal plots.

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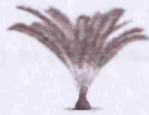
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As these final lines are written, I watch the days unfurl out longer and brighter in our dear little London garden. I thank God and I am grateful for the time I have spent in this city, which has inspired so many aspects of this work, and changed my life. As summer draws to its longest day, I remember especially two important people whom I miss dearly. My father and my grandmother would have cheered loudest to see this work finally completed. This thesis is for them.

51 Barker Drive
London
17 June 2006

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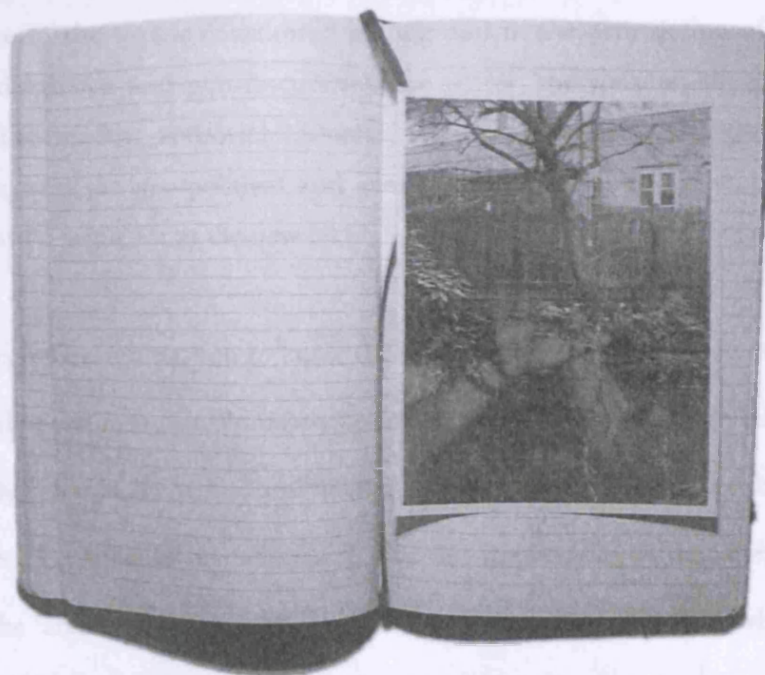
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Architectural Experience, Feminine Landscapes

Prologue

Charlotte, Madison, Boston



Prologue

Architectural Encounters, Feminine Locations

Questions, Intentions, Contexts

The space of the text is constituted among and in the articulation of several entities (discursive and non-discursive): the writer, the speaker, the said, the written, the reader, authorial histories, the non-said, the unspeakable, the economic, and the geo-political and gendered place of enunciation. This is, then, what I'll argue for as the new text.¹

This thesis begins from a passion to know the 'architectural subject'. How we know and how we tell what we know are ultimately bound to where we are placed in relation to our object of study,² that is, 'knowing' and 'telling' are positional and do more than neutrally communicate the results of one's research. In this thesis, I argue that they are acts of agency and the 'architectural subject' is never an *a priori* subject. As such, what is known, and what gets told as the 'architectural subject', is a relational and ephemeral structure linking the person who is engaged in knowing *with* the architectural object. Through this thesis, I propose that the 'architectural subject' emerges through a series of complex negotiations between the knower and her object of study.

¹ Elspeth Probyn, "'Après le texte qui vient?": Ghosts in the (Missing) Text', in Marysia Lewandowska (ed.), *The Missing Text* (London: Chance Books, 1991), pp.101-16; here p.105.

² See Jane Rendell, *The Pursuit of Pleasure: Gender, Space and Architecture in Regency London* (London: Athlone Press, 2002), p.16.

In '*Après le texte qui vient?*' ('*What comes after the text?*'), literary theorist Elspeth Probyn discusses the problem of criticism as a disembodied practice – a 'fear of the near' – such that one is cautioned against the danger of being proximate to the text and of experiencing it for oneself, a tradition which has consequently distanced the reader from the text.³ The disembodied language of criticism, according to Probyn, stems from the incestuous textual activity which privileges the voices of a few key critics, who are constantly cited and reread, and whose voices stand in as the objective distance between the reader and the text.⁴ The process of critical distancing that Probyn brings up here is a hierarchical structure normative to critical discourse – 'a historical organizing principle of critical discourse' where on one level, one is persuaded to 'stand back from the text', and on another level, to 'stand back from oneself' by relying on the expert opinion of the critic.⁵

Probyn warns that this practice not only 're-entrench texts and critics in their usual places', thus, limiting new epistemological activity, but also becomes a self-indulgent, non-political 'game of language,... without any exterior stakes'.⁶ Instead, she urges the reader to interrogate how she encounters the text, to probe how the self is involved in the arrangement of a textual critical model because 'however hidden, we are already in the text'.⁷ Consequently, textual interpretation for Probyn, is something always to be encountered anew, a fluid practice that reflects 'a moment within an ever-changing set of possibilities, of bodies, experiences and memories'.⁸

³ Probyn, '*Après le texte qui vient?*', p.108.

⁴ Probyn, '*Après le texte qui vient?*', p.108.

⁵ Probyn, '*Après le texte qui vient?*', p.108.

⁶ Probyn, '*Après le texte qui vient?*', pp.109-10.

⁷ Probyn, '*Après le texte qui vient?*', p.111.

⁸ Probyn, '*Après le texte qui vient?*', p.112.

The detour through Probyn and literary criticism brings into sharp relief similar problems in architectural discourse. The agency of the experiencing subject – who may be positioned for example as critic, writer, reader, theorist, historian, occupant and/or interested observer, in relation to her architectural object of study – is, with few exceptions, seldom considered in architectural discourse.⁹ Here, I use the term ‘experiencing subject’ specifically to refer to subject positions outside those of the architect’s. An ‘architect-centred’ architectural discourse common in many undergraduate reading lists and constituting the standard architectural history and theory canon is, as Karen Burns reiterates, about the ‘signing’ of a building by the singular masculine figure of the architect:

One way of describing architectural history might be that it is a history of proper names. It collects and inscribes the names of persons identified as architect. The definition of architecture in these texts by Pevsner (Nikolaus) et al is inextricably linked to the singular figure of the architect. In this way, architecture is a signed surface not *just* a built space. Unsigned built spaces in this order are attached to other entities; the landscape, the community, anonymous builders, nature.

Architecture can be traced to singular, often male identities.¹⁰

⁹ Notable exceptions include for example, the work of Jane Rendell, Karen Bermann, Jennifer Bloomer, Katja Grillner, Barbara Penner, Iain Borden, Adrian Forty and Jonathan Hill. The contributions of these architectural theorists and historians will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter and extensively in *Theoretical Contexts*, pp.60-75.

¹⁰ Karen Burns, ‘Architecture/Discipline/Bondage’, in Duncan McCorquodale, Katerina Ruedi and Sarah Wigglesworth (eds.), *Desiring Practices: Architecture, Gender and The Interdisciplinary* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 1996), pp.73-86; here p.77. For a feminist interdisciplinary critique of an architectural history focused on ‘the architect’, see Barbara Penner, ‘Researching Female Public Toilets: Gendered Spaces, Disciplinary Limits’, in *Journal of International Women’s Studies* (June 2005), v.6, n.2, pp.81-98. Examples of ‘architect-

In displacing the emphasis from ‘architect-centred’ to ‘experiencing subject’, I am also implicitly shifting the politics of architectural discourse from one centred on a production of knowledge emanating from dominant masculine positions of identity, power and access to symbolic cultural and societal norms, to more fragile and contingent positions of knowledge, emanating from identities that are always partial, partisan and contestable. In doing so, I wish to reclaim the pivotal role of the experiencing subject from an architectural canon resounding with autonomous architect-centred interpretations, which ultimately renders subject positions outside those of the architect’s, invisible and voiceless.

In this dissertation, I explore the agency of the experiencing subject in the construction of architectural knowledge. Central to my inquiry is the question: How is the ‘architectural subject’ constituted? I begin to problematize this question by suggesting that the ‘architectural subject’ is not a given entity, but rather one that develops through specific contact between the experiencing subject and the architectural object of study. Through this contingent relationship, I advocate the emergence of a reinvigorated concept of the architectural subject matter – a concept, which necessarily binds the ‘double subject’, that is, the experiencing subject and the architectural subject matter – as what I call, the *architectural encounter*. Thus, I propose that the ‘architectural subject’ is reconstituted as an architectural encounter between the experiencing subject and the architectural object.

centred’ discourses, which form a large part of the architectural canon include Nikolaus Pevsner, *An Outline of European Architecture* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977); Nikolaus Pevsner, *Pioneers of the Modern Movement: From William Morris to Walter Gropius* (London: Faber, 1936); Kenneth Frampton, *Modern Architecture: A Critical History* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1980); Spiro Kostof (ed.), *The Architect: Chapters in the History of a Profession* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977).

The thesis develops a theory and practice specifically for the architectural *intimate encounter*, through an exploration of the Raffles Hotel, a famous colonial monument in Singapore. The intimate encounter is a particular mode of architectural encounter where the ‘double subject’ is put at risk, that is, the experiencing subject’s epistemological position remains fluid while the reinvigorated architectural subject of encounter is conceptualized as a complex, and often, contradictory construct.

The idea of the subject-at-risk is, in part, developed from Julia Kristeva’s notion of the ‘subject in process’.¹¹ Kristeva asserts that the subject is never a unified and static self but is constituted through a negotiation between familial and cultural attributes (what she terms ‘the symbolic’) and the individual’s unconscious bodily drives (what she terms ‘the semiotic’).¹² Kristeva’s scheme of the symbolic and the semiotic is especially important to the reconfiguration of signification – how meaning-making takes place – since she implicates the ‘invisible’ experiencing subject as a key player in the processes of signification and interpretation. Similarly, for Probyn, Susan Rubin Suleiman and Nancy K. Miller, although the acknowledgement of the experiencing subject’s ‘self-interest’ in their subject matter brings the critical self ‘into play, and into risk’,¹³ it enables the experiencing subject to interrogate her ‘self-interest’,¹⁴ that is, to critically understand the process by which she knows and relates to her object of study.

¹¹ See Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. Margaret Waller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), p.ix, p.22.

¹² Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, pp.21-4

¹³ Susan Rubin Suleiman, ‘Introduction: The Risk of Being Contemporary’, in *Risking Who One Is: Encounters with Contemporary Art and Literature* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1994), pp.1-10; here p.6.

¹⁴ See Probyn, ‘*Après le texte qui vient?*’, p.112; Suleiman, ‘Introduction’, pp.1-10; Nancy K. Miller, ‘Changing the Subject: Authorship, Writing and the Reader’, in *Subject to Change: Reading Feminist Writing* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), pp.102-21.

An architectural intimate encounter, thus, reinstalls the agency of the experiencing subject and re-appraises the relational process by which her architectural knowledge is constructed. Through the architectural intimate encounter, the 'architectural subject' is understood as a relational, multifaceted, and often, an ambiguous construction which exceeds an architect-centred notion of architecture. In this mode, the experiencing subject is a self-conscious subject, often a theorist, who is aware that her own architectural experience falls short of what is already described in architectural discourse. The fact that this architectural experience is meaningful for her, and that it falls into one of the epistemological gaps in architectural discourse, matters to her. Rather than papering over this gap, the experiencing subject critiques her self-interest by theorizing her particular relationship with the architectural object.

By proposing an examination of the Raffles Hotel, a National Monument in Singapore, through an architectural intimate encounter, this research contributes an original architectural method for the study of architectural objects in this geographical locale, and critiques the region's established architectural methodology. Although the exact terminology used may vary, for example, 'critical regionalist architecture', 'tropical architecture' or 'postcolonial architecture', the Southeast Asian architectural context habitually frames its architectural subject matter within discourses of identity linked to regionalist or nationalist concerns.¹⁵ This agenda is unsurprising and reasonable given

¹⁵ See for example, Alexander Tzonis, Liane Lefaivre and Bruno Stagno (eds.), *Tropical Architecture: Critical Regionalism in the Age of Globalization* (Chichester: Wiley-Academy, 2001), pp.1-13; Tay Kheng-Soon, 'Architecture and National Identity', in *SLA7*, (July/August 1990), n.161, pp.13-15. For critical perspectives of tropical architecture's epistemology and ideological construction, see for example, Wong Yunn-Chü, 'Discourse on Tropical Architecture: Its Meanings and Stakes in Colonial Singapore', in *Singapore Architect*,

that many countries in this region have struggled to establish their own nascent identities in the wake of colonial independence, and architecture has offered one of the most physically pliant modes in which the nation's self-expression may be manifested.¹⁶ However, while this focused agenda and method raises the profile of neglected architectural work in the Southeast Asian context and crucially rehabilitates historical aspects of their architectural past, its dominance conversely creates several blindspots in the region's architectural epistemology.

First, the issue of national or regional identity is, I argue, problematic because it is unclear whose identity is at stake and who is entitled to speak. As cultural theorist Ella Shohat questions, 'Who is mobilizing what in the articulation of the past, developing what identities, identifications and representations in the name, of what political visions and goals?'¹⁷ In this vein, identity discourses have been criticized for non-specific identity claims made for a 'general' people or 'nation',¹⁸ which suggests that identity is something fixed to the vernacular or a nation's history and culture. Conversely, 'the politics of identity' as cultural geographer Jane M. Jacobs argues, is undeniably a changing and fragile situation defined by a politics of 'an unbound geography of difference and context'.¹⁹

(2002), n.213, pp.78-83; Anoma Pieris, 'The Search for Tropical Identities: A Critical History', in Philip Goad and Anoma Pieris, *New Directions in Tropical Asian Architecture* (Singapore: Periplus, 2005), pp.22-33.

¹⁶ The exception is Thailand. In the nineteenth century, it resisted the trend through self-colonization, that is, by combining European norms with home-grown royalist loyalties. See Thongchai Winichakul, *Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-body of a Nation* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994).

¹⁷ Ella Shohat, 'Notes on the "Post-Colonial"', in *Social Text* (1992), n.31/32, pp.99-113; here p.110.

¹⁸ For limits on postcolonial and regionalist debates, see for example, Shohat, 'Notes on the "Post-Colonial"', pp.99-113; Jane M. Jacobs, *Edge of Empire: Postcolonialism and the City* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp.22-37; and for architectural discourse, see Keith L. Eggener, 'Placing Resistance: A Critique of Critical Regionalism', in *Journal of Architectural Education*, (May 2002), v.55, n.4, pp.228-37.

¹⁹ Jacobs, *Edge of Empire*, p.36.

Second, and following the first point, this limited agenda restricts the range of architectural issues and overlooks other urgent themes and voices, for example, feminist interpretations, questions around patriarchy and gender, and critical contributions by disenfranchised groups such as women, migrants and ethnic minorities within the region itself.²⁰ Agreeing with Shohat who argues that the term 'postcolonial' (a term that architectural theorist Keith L. Eggener has also allied with 'regionalism')²¹ is dehistoricized, neutralized and ungendered, I have intentionally identified with a feminist stance in my own research.²² To my knowledge, there is, as yet, no sustained feminist architectural interpretation in the Southeast Asian context. Thus, the feminist architectural interpretation of the Raffles Hotel addresses this epistemological lack as it also critiques the dominance of architectural methodologies implicitly emphasizing abstract 'regional', 'state', or 'national' identities.

Third and finally, the regionalist and national identity discourses are generated autonomously around an architect-centred view of architectural knowledge, if only substituting the Western canon of architects with an alternative list of the region's own architectural heroes.²³

²⁰ David Scott argues that 'postcoloniality operated by implicitly occupying the horizon of nationalist projects already defined by the anticolonialist project', that is to say, postcoloniality may, in some instances, be co-existent with structures of power, for example, 'nation-state sovereignty'. See David Scott, *Refashioning Futures: Criticism After Postcoloniality* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), pp.3-20; here p.14.

²¹ Eggener, 'Placing Resistance', pp.234-5.

²² Shohat, 'Notes on the "Post-Colonial"', pp.107-8.

²³ The case studies examined by proponents of regionalist discourse, Tzonis and Lefaivre, and Kenneth Frampton, revolve around the works of architects. See for example, Liane Lefaivre and Alexander Tzonis, *Critical Regionalism: Architecture and Identity in a Globalized World* (Munich: Prestel, 2003).

In keeping with the research's primary aim to examine the constitution of the 'architectural subject' through positions outside those of the architect's, that is, by specifically reclaiming the agency of the experiencing subject, I suggest instead several key theoretical contexts, from which this thesis develops its own methodologies. For me, each of these contexts – drawn selectively from architectural theory, literary discourse and feminist theories – forefront the critical role of the experiencing subject as a specific, self-conscious, contingent, embodied and visible figure central to architectural knowledge construction. These theoretical contexts suggest that an architectural discourse, which seriously considers how we know and how we tell what we know, may not be bound to an architect-centred discourse, but instead opens architectural discourse to the experiencing subject's encounter, which as Probyn points out, reflects 'an ever-changing set of possibilities, of bodies, experiences and memories'.²⁴

Firstly, the thesis considers existing architectural research on the experiencing subject suggested in the work of Jonathan Hill, Iain Borden, Jane Rendell, Barbara Penner and Adrian Forty.²⁵ These works emphasize how architecture may be alternatively defined through the activity of the user, for example, in terms of the creative occupation of a building (Rendell and Hill), or the changing use of language in re-articulating architectural objects and concepts (Forty), or the bodily subversion of a predetermined

²⁴ Probyn, 'Après le texte qui vient?', p.112.

²⁵ See for example, Jonathan Hill, *Actions of Architecture: Architects and Creative Users* (London: Routledge, 2003); Iain Borden, *Skateboarding, Space, and the City: Architecture and the Body* (London: Berg, 2001); Jane Rendell, 'Doing it, (Un)Doing it, (Over)Doing it Yourself: Rhetorics of Architectural Abuse', in Jonathan Hill (ed.), *Occupying Architecture* (London: Routledge, 1998), pp.229-46; Adrian Forty, *Words and Buildings: A Vocabulary of Modern Architecture* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2000); Barbara Penner, 'Rehearsing Domesticity: Honeymoon Resorts in Postwar America', in Hilde Heynen and Gulsum Baydar (eds.), *Negotiating Domesticity: Spatial Productions of Gender in Modern Architecture* (London: Routledge, 2005), pp.103-20.

architectural site (Borden), or the manifestation of gendered locations of class, culture and popular consumption (Penner and Rendell).

Secondly, it develops for an architectural context, the work of feminist theorists like Nancy K. Miller, Dorothea Olkowski, Tamsin Lorraine and Susan Rubin Suleiman who advocate radical epistemological concepts which take into account the critical but problematic role of a self-conscious experiencing subject in knowledge construction.²⁶

Thirdly, my approach aligns itself more closely to postcolonial *feminist* theorists for whom 'epistemology' and 'identity' are contingent constructs, and where 'identity' is necessarily specific, contested and mobile. Notably, many of these theorists, for example, Trinh T. Minh-Ha, bell hooks, Gloria Anzaldua, Ien Ang and Rey Chow, operate outside the architectural context.²⁷

As a consequence and fourthly, I delineate a specific architectural academic context which closely reflects on the work of four architectural theorists – Jane Rendell, Karen Bermann, Katja Grillner and Jennifer Bloomer – for whom, I suggest, the role of the experiencing subject in the construction of the architectural subject is key, and from which, my own proposed methodology of an architectural intimate encounter, derives its motivation.²⁸

²⁶ See *Empirical Contexts*, pp.115-9; *An Architecture of Intimate Encounter*, pp.127-34.

²⁷ See for example, Ien Ang, *On Not Speaking Chinese: Living Between Asia and the West* (London: Routledge, 2001); Rey Chow, *Writing Diaspora: Tactics of Intervention in Contemporary Cultural Study* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993); bell hooks, *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (Boston: South End Press, 1990).

²⁸ For a detailed analysis on the works of these architectural theorists, see *Theoretical Contexts*, pp.60-75.

Fifth and finally, I theorize the approaches of these architectural theorists and develop my own architectural theory and practice of the architectural intimate encounter by expanding a set of key ideas extrapolated from Julia Kristeva, Gilles Deleuze and Roland Barthes. These ideas revolve around notions of subjectivity and agency of the experiencing subject namely, the semiotic (Kristeva), the spatio-temporal structure of unjointed time (Deleuze) and the punctual detail which ‘pricks’ the experiencing subject (Barthes).²⁹ From these ideas I develop three key aspects of the architectural intimate encounter, these being, one, the relational role of the experiencing subject in reconstituting the architectural subject matter as an architectural encounter. Two, the construction of a new spatio-temporal context of encounter which enables a critical interpretation of multiple spaces, times, subjects and experiences intersecting in an architectural space encountered by the experiencing subject. And three, associative interpretations of the intimate detail, which employ metaphorical and metonymical relationships to reveal architectural meanings, hitherto, undermined and/or repressed by conventional architectural discourse privileging a lineage of architects, architectural styles, forms and influences.

Instead of analyzing the hotel through the architect-centred approach mentioned earlier, this dissertation proposes a creative and critical³⁰ architectural interpretation.

²⁹ These ideas are discussed at length in Part One: *An Architecture of Intimate Encounter*. See *Theoretical Contexts*, pp.44-53 for a discussion on Kristeva’s ‘the semiotic’ and *An Architecture of Intimate Encounter*, pp.134-7 and pp.137-42 for an exploration of Deleuze’s ‘time-out-of-joint’ and Barthes’ ‘punctum’, respectively.

³⁰ I borrow the descriptive shorthand ‘creative and critical’ from Jane Rendell’s discursive use of these terms to articulate the non-hierarchical and symbiotic relationship she proposes between ‘theory’ and ‘practice’ and the embodied relationship of these two terms to the experiencing subject. Here, ‘theory’ refers to the realm of ideas while ‘practice’ includes for example, architectural design and architectural history. ‘The relationship between two (theory and practice) is not one of illustration or application. ... Each historical moment offers a particular set of conditions, and depending on their own life story, each person takes a

Emphasizing a relational construction of the 'architectural subject', which implicates the 'double subject' constituted by the experiencing subject and her architectural subject matter of study, it attempts to articulate these aspects within an original methodological and conceptual framework defined by the epistemological figure of the 'spiderweb'. I emphasize that the spiderweb is an architectural construction tied to the body of its (feminine) maker, that is, the spider. Architectural webs are spun in relation to the intimate details and their corresponding floral and animal 'plots' encountered at the Raffles Hotel's Palm Court and its Billiard Room.

The Spiderweb, the Intimate Detail and Plots at the Raffles Hotel

... like a spider's web. Attached ever so lightly perhaps, but still attached to life at all four corners ... (W)hen the web is pulled askew, hooked up on the edge, torn in the middle, one remembers that these webs are not spun in mid air by incorporeal creatures.³¹

By reflecting on what I suggest are creative-critical figures of architectural encounter, for example Rendell's 'confessional constructions', Grillner's 'dialogical constructions',

different angle'. See Jane Rendell, 'Between Two', in *The Journal of Architecture*, (Summer 2003), v.8, pp.271-38; here p.222. See other arguments on inventive criticism, see Gregory L. Ulmer, 'The Object of Post-Criticism', in Hal Foster (ed.), *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture* (Washington: Bay Press, 1983), pp.83-110; Gavin Butt, 'Introduction: The Paradoxes of Criticism', in Gavin Butt (ed.), *After Criticism: New Responses to Art and Performance* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), pp.1-20.

³¹ Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (London: Penguin Books, 2000), p.43.

Bermann's 'friendly reader' and Bloomer's 'minor architecture',³² this research adopts the spiderweb specifically as an epistemological figure for the intimate encounter. My interest in the spiderweb initially derives from its mythical association with an alternative feminine subjectivity, linked especially to Arachne, who having woven subversive stories about patriarchal repression and misdeeds, was condemned to spin silk from her body for the rest of her life, as a spider. Following Miller's notion of 'arachnology', which rematerializes the spiderweb as a 'topographically'³³ grounded and gendered structure connected to the specificity of its location and to the corporeality of its maker,³⁴ the spiderweb articulates the relational and embodied character of an intimate encounter. It is also a feminine spatio-temporal figure that expresses architectural discourse as a complex web of times, spaces, subjects and experiences, and re-articulates the architectural subject of encounter as a series of changeable and contingent constellations.

Significantly, the architecture of intimate encounter proposes a radically different type of architectural discourse in that it does not seek to analyze the architectural object within a chronologically ordered historical context. Instead, it attempts to theorize the compositional possibilities of a chronologically complex space-time that arises from an architectural encounter juxtaposing different times, spaces, subjects and experiences. Here, I am inspired by Kristeva's notion of 'women's time', in which she advocates a

³² Jane Rendell, 'An Atlas of the Welsh Dresser', in Ken Ehrlich and Brandon Labelle (eds.), *Surface Tension: Problematics of Site*, (New York: Errant Bodies, 2003), pp.283-92; Katja Grillner, 'Writing and Landscape – Setting Scenes for Critical Reflection', in *The Journal of Architecture*, (Summer 2003), v.8, pp.239-49; Karen Bermann, 'The House Behind', in Heidi J. Nast and Steve Pile (eds.), *Places Through the Body* (London: Routledge, 1998), pp.165-80; Jennifer Bloomer, *Architecture and the Text: The (S)cripts of Joyce and Piranesi* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), pp.40-2, pp.173-4.

³³ Nancy K. Miller, 'Arachnologies: The Woman, The Text, and the Critic', in *Subject to Change*, pp.77-101; here p.78.

³⁴ Miller, 'Arachnologies', p.77, pp.96-7.

radical spatio-temporal context where the experiencing subject's own space and time actively intersects and expands the knowledge limited by a hierarchical and chronological notion of historical time.³⁵ I also examine the Deleuzian notion of 'time out of joint' in which multiple temporalities, spaces, subjects and experiences converge in an architectural space of encounter.³⁶

The thesis's chosen time frame, 1887-1925 and 1987-2005, coheres with this concept of overlapping contexts in that it draws together the most significant historical context for the two investigated architectural spaces (the Palm Court and the Billiard Room) and this experiencing subject's own contemporary time of encounter. Thus, the resultant discourse challenges the notion of an architectural history ordered by chronological time, and expands the scope of architectural history and theory by critically accounting for and theorizing the role of the experiencing subject in the constitution and interpretation of her architectural object of study.

From Barthes, I adapt the concept of the 'punctum' to describe the associative potential of the intimate detail.³⁷ The intimate detail is an element that 'pricks' the attention of the experiencing subject, being an entity that exists within the architectural object, but which is neglected by architectural discourse. I argue that a close reading of the intimate detail prompts metaphorical and/or metonymical interpretations, which may reveal surplus architectural meanings and contexts, not otherwise evident from an interpretation of the physical building itself, nor sufficiently addressed in current architectural discourse.

³⁵ Julia Kristeva, 'Women's Time', in Kelly Oliver (ed.), *The Portable Kristeva* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), pp.351-71.

³⁶ See for example, John Rajchman, *The Deleuze Connections* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2000), pp.129-31.

³⁷ See Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* (London: Vintage, 2000), pp.25-60.

The three aspects of the intimate encounter – namely, the relational role of the experiencing subject, the architectural interpretation that takes place in a spatio-temporal context marked by a time-out-of-joint and the associative interpretations of the intimate detail – are played out in the examination of two key spaces in the Raffles Hotel, which are the Palm Court and the Billiard Room. The choice of the ‘architectural subject’ here interrogates the experiencing subject’s knowledge of, and interest in, these two spaces. It problematizes the fact that her knowledge is shaped by ostensibly non-architectural connections, which overshadow the importance of the hotel’s architectural facts expressed, for example, in its architect’s history and the building’s formal styles.

The fame of the Palm Court is linked to its most famous occupant, the English novelist W. Somerset Maugham who spent his time writing in this garden during his three visits to the hotel in 1921, 1925 and 1959. It is from Maugham that the often-quoted line ‘Raffles, for all the fables of the exotic East’ was drawn.³⁸ The Billiard Room on the other hand, is infamous for harbouring a series of wild animals on the run in the early part of the twentieth century.³⁹ Best known amongst these creatures was a runaway circus tiger, which sought refuge in the undercroft space of the Billiard Room, and was

³⁸ See Gretchen Liu, *Raffles Hotel* (Singapore: Editions Didier Millet, 2006), p.91; Raymond Flower, *Year of the Tiger* (Singapore: Times Books International, 1986), p.13, p.23-8; Raymond Flower, ‘The Palm Courts of Maugham and Coward’, in *Raffles: The Story of Singapore* (Beckenham: Croon Helm, 1984), pp.161-4; Roberto Pregarz, ‘Somerset Maugham Another Story’ and ‘Raffles Writers’, in *Memories of Raffles: 22 Years With a Grand Old Hotel* (Singapore: Treasury Publishing, 1990), pp.52-7, pp.74-83; Ilsa Sharp, *There is Only One Raffles: The Story of a Grand Hotel* (London: Souvenir Press, 1981), pp.105-8.

³⁹ Liu, *Raffles Hotel*, pp.66-7; Pregarz, ‘Tigers in the Tiffin Room’, in *Memories of Raffles*, pp.42-7; Flower, *Raffles*, p.71; Flower, *Year of the Tiger*, pp.20-1; Sharp, *There is Only One Raffles*, pp.35-7; ‘A Tiger in Town: Shot at Raffles Hotel Under the Billiard Room’, in *The Straits Times*, 13 August 1902; ‘Python at Raffles: The Famous Tiger Hunt Recalled by a Snake Capture’, in *The Straits Times*, 10 January 1903; ‘Boar Hunt at Raffles: Another Wild *Shikar* on the Hotel Verandah’, in *The Straits Times*, 27 February 1903; ‘Great Hunt at Raffles: Terrible Struggle Between the Fat *Jagah* and a Fatter Pig’, in *The Straits Times*, 6 September 1904.

unceremoniously shot here in 1902. It is significant that the Palm Court and the Billiard Room constitute two of the hotel's key architectural spaces but at the same time these spaces unfold through knowledge that exceeds an architect-centred notion of architecture. The epistemological passage of knowing these spaces through Maugham and the animals, such that the architectural subject matter of the Palm Court and the Billiard Room emerge as reinvigorated architectural subjects of encounter, is relevant to this thesis.

The interpretations of the Palm Court and the Billiard Room are conducted through the feminized representations of tropical flora and fauna, which are juxtaposed against the patriarchal image of the hotel associated with Maugham and the colonial hunter. Through a close reading of these floral and animal associations, the thesis seeks to flesh out the hotel's simultaneous dependence on, and suppression of, a feminine imaginary. An intimate detail from each of these architectural spaces – the palm tree in the Palm Court, and the billiard table in the Billiard Room – is closely examined to derive critical architectural concepts that enable associative interpretations, reflective of this experiencing subject's intimate encounter. These architectural concepts constitute what I call the hotel's floral and animal 'plots'.

Hotel spaces in general, have been linked to the notion of 'plot' by Rem Koolhaas, Sigfried Kracauer, Douglas Tallack and James Clifford.⁴⁰ In their readings, the space of

⁴⁰ Rem Koolhaas, *Delirious New York: A Retroactive Manifesto for Manhattan* (New York: Monacelli Press, 1994), pp.148-9; Douglas Tallack, "'Waiting, Waiting": The Hotel Lobby, in The Modern City', in Neil Leach (ed.) *The Hieroglyphics of Space: Reading and Experiencing The Modern Metropolis* (London: Routledge, 2002), pp.139-51; Siegfried Kracauer, 'The Hotel Lobby', in *The Mass Ornament*, trans. Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1995), pp.173-85; James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1997), pp.17-18, p.25, pp.30-3.

the hotel is re-interpreted beyond conventional architectural typology⁴¹ by considering traditionally non-architectural materials and evidences, for example, stories connected to, and traces left by, the hotel's occupants. 'Plot', according to literary critic Peter Brooks, 'is not a matter of typology or of fixed structures, but rather a structuring operation'.⁴² Thus, in this thesis, 'plot' describes the associative interpretations involving metonymical and metaphorical concepts derived from the intimate detail. These associative concepts critically re-order the architectural space and time of the Palm Court and Billiard Room.

The Palm Court is explored through the floral plot of 'grafting', a concept which alludes to the botanical process of transplanting new hybrids but more particularly to the fertile associations between tropical flora and a network of feminine spaces. The thesis explores a new metonymic architectural typology for the Palm Court – constituting a rhizomatic web of feminized spaces – driven by its connection to Maugham. Contesting the neat physical boundaries and the gender-neutral architectural records of this garden, I will argue that Maugham's Palm Court is a space of feminine excess.

The Billiard Room, on the other hand, is investigated through the metaphorical animal plot of 'overturning', a concept derived from the mistaken rumour that there was a tiger under the billiard table (the tiger was under the Billiard Room). The metaphorical process of 'overturning' is developed from the position of being 'under' the table, or of 'turning the tables on someone', which suggests a subversive operation. Hence, the Billiard Room's association with animals is re-examined by taking into account the

⁴¹ For studies focusing on formal architectural typology, see for example, Nikolaus Pevsner, *A History of Building Types* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1976), pp.169-92; Elaine Denby, *Grand Hotels: Reality & Illusion: An Architectural and Social History* (London: Reaktion Press, 1998).

⁴² Peter Brooks, 'Reading for the Plot', in Martin Mcquillan (ed.), *The Narrative Reader* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp.145-52; here p.145.

metaphorical relationships connected to 'the animal'. This interpretation reveals a web of metaphorical relationships that revolve around the prominence of grotesque bodies and children's stories, which I will argue, constitutes a repressed feminine foundation that shores up what is typically perceived as a masculine colonial space.

Ultimately, the architectural intimate encounter, seeks to tease out the repressed feminine characteristics, which emergent architectural histories of the colonial hotel – hitherto represented as an androcentric space, on the one hand, by default of a colonial past dominated by male figures and occupants,⁴³ and on the other hand, through an architect-centred architectural history shaped by ambitions for a national identity⁴⁴ – has problematically overlooked, or systematically ignored.

⁴³ The historical monographs of the hotel, unsurprisingly, do not take a critical stance towards the masculine aspect of its colonial past, although there is mention of racial discrimination (the hotel was only open to Europeans until the 1930s) and the unevenness of male and female subjects in the hotel, where in 1911, the ratio of men to women residents was eight to one. The colonial past is sketched by Sharp, Liu and Flower as one populated predominantly by men who habitually take the role of planters, administrators, civil servants, businessmen, travelers, hunters and explorers. See for example, Liu, *Raffles Hotel*, pp.46-7, pp.73-5; Flower, *Year of the Tiger*, p.8, p.17.

⁴⁴ There is, as yet, no sustained critical architectural historical account on the Raffles Hotel. However, where architectural references are made to the hotel, they emphasize, almost without exception, the major role played by the main architect involved in the 1897 renovations, that is, R. A. J. Bidwell, formerly of the Architectural Association, and later, architect of several landmark buildings in Kuala Lumpur and Singapore. Examples of such publications include architectural anthologies, the hotel's own commissioned historical monographs, heritage publications and conservation guidelines, and articles in architectural magazines. A selection of these architectural publications include, for example, Jane Beamish and Jane Ferguson, *A History of Singapore Architecture: The Making of a City* (Singapore: Graham Brash, 1985), pp.80-2; M. Gretchen, *Pastel Portraits: Singapore's Architectural Heritage* (Singapore: Singapore Coordinating Committee, 1984), pp.138-40; Robert Powell, *Living Legacy: Singapore's Architectural Heritage Renewed* (Singapore: Singapore Heritage Society, 1997), pp.176-83; Gretchen Liu, *In Granite and Chunam: The National Monuments of Singapore* (Singapore: Landmark Books, 1996), pp.230-41; Setyadi Ongkowitzjaja, 'Raffles Hotel: The Restoration Approach', in *Singapore Institute of Architects Journal*, (May/June 1992), n.172, p.44 (followed by 5 unpaginated pages); *Raffles Hotel Preservation Guidelines* (Vol.1) (Singapore: Urban Redevelopment Authority and Preservation of Monuments Board, June 1997), pp.18-21, p.48; Sharp, *There is Only One Raffles*, p.31, p.34;

The Feminine and the Archive

Sexual difference ... reflects a difference in the relation between subjects and the symbolic contract, that is, the social contract. It is a matter of clarifying the difference between men and women as concerns their respective relationships to power, language and meaning.⁴⁵

My understanding and use of the term 'the feminine' draws from and expands Kristeva's complex, and not always consistent, use of the same term. According to Kristeva, 'the feminine' is not to be 'objectified by a woman' but rather to indicate 'the sense of a region of alterity in all symbolic experiences'.⁴⁶ Her definition (or non-definition) of 'the feminine' is not dissimilar to propositions made by Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray, who assert that the feminine is not necessarily the prerogative of the female subject just as the masculine is not the prerogative of the male subject, but rather, the feminine is framed as 'a way of apprehending the world', which contests the symbolic order and is aligned with the maternal body.⁴⁷

Liu, *Raffles Hotel*, pp.19-20, p.44, pp.56-7; Flower, *Year of the Tiger*, p.73. For discussion on the hotel's emergent architectural history, see *Empirical Contexts*, pp.99-109.

⁴⁵ Kristeva, 'Women's Time', pp.358-9.

⁴⁶ Julia Kristeva, 'Entretien', in *Textuel*, (1984), v.13, n.34/44, *Les Femmes et les Institutions Littéraires*, pp.59-64; here p.62, cited by Margaret Attack, 'The Other: Feminist', in *Paragraph*, (1986), v.8, pp.25-39; here p.25. I am grateful to Jane Rendell for bringing this text to my attention.

⁴⁷ See Claudette Sartillot, 'The Flower, the Fruit, the Feminine', in *Herbarium Verbarium: The Discourse of Flowers* (Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1993), pp.117-49; especially p.124, pp.136-8.

Problematically, ‘the feminine’ according to Kristeva, Cixous and Irigaray, although linked to the maternal body and perceived as a resisting force to masculine modes of thinking, representation and practice, does not always implicate a feminist stance. It is equally unclear whether these three thinkers are actually targeting a specific form of feminism, which mirrors the patriarchal structure, and could be thought of as repeating the symbolic order.⁴⁸ Instead, I find more useful Kristeva’s argument that the ‘new generation’ of ‘feminist subversion’ will ultimately focus on ‘sexual difference’ such that ‘the feminine’ (*le féminin*) ‘will combine the sexual and the symbolic in order to discover the specificity of the feminine and then the specificity of each woman’.⁴⁹

My own use of ‘the feminine’ borrows from the notion of a subversive and rupturing force within the symbolic architectural order, which is often phallogentric in its knowledge and methods. However, I emphasize that ‘the feminine’, at least in this thesis, is inseparable from the sexual category of this experiencing subject and her feminist stance. I understand ‘the feminine’ as a way of seeing the world – engaging modes of knowing and telling – mediated by sexual difference.⁵⁰ ‘The feminine’ is a mode of knowing and telling bound to this experiencing subject’s relationship to language, power and meaning. This relationship is crucially negotiated through her own sexual

⁴⁸ Kristeva, Irigaray and Cixous have different interpretations of ‘the feminine’ although all three see it as a transgressive force. Kristeva’s concept of femininity emanates from within a patriarchal, symbolic system, while the feminine for Irigaray and Cixous, lie outside of the symbolic order. For a critique of Kristeva’s ambivalence towards feminism, see Elizabeth Grosz, *Sexual Subversions: Three French Feminists* (Sydney: Allen Unwin, 1989), pp.91-9; Atack, ‘The Other: Feminist’, p.35; Elizabeth Grosz, *Space, Time, and Perversion: Essays on the Politics of Bodies* (London: Routledge, 1995), p.76. For accounts of Irigaray’s attitude towards the feminism, see Grosz, *Sexual Subversions*, pp.140-6; Margaret Whitford, *Luce Irigaray: Philosophy in the Feminine* (London: Routledge, 1991), pp.9-25. For accounts of Hélène Cixous’s attitude towards feminism, see Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics* (London: Routledge, 2003), pp.100-8.

⁴⁹ Kristeva, ‘Women’s Time’, p.359.

⁵⁰ See Grosz’s argument in favour of sexual difference in Grosz, *Space, Time, and Perversion*, pp.49-57.

specificity, in my case, as a feminist and as a woman from an ethnic minority group. The interwoven relationship between ‘the feminine’, the sexual specificity of the experiencing subject, and her political stance is, I argue, far from an essentialist position. Rather, it grounds architectural interpretation to the body of the experiencing subject (mine) not in terms of biological essence, but in terms of agency and responsibility.

The presence of ‘the feminine’ in the intimate encounter of the Raffles Hotel is marked by an attentiveness to potential ruptures in masculine colonial architectural discourse. It traces other subjects and practices that underlie this symbolic order but are repressed and thus, expressed as a passive feminine condition. A critical rehabilitation of ‘the feminine’ also involves a radical restructuring of patriarchal knowledge structures since its modes of knowing are shaped by non-conventional means, for example in this case, through the intimate encounter.

One major structural renovation is the thesis’s response to the notion of the archive. It suggests that the legitimized architectural archive, which constitutes a set of jealously guarded architectural drawings, is less important than what is surplus to traditional architectural knowledge but central to the intimate encounter. This surplus material – which includes anecdotal evidence for example, gossip and children’s stories; traditionally non-architectural texts for example biographies and fictions, as well as periphra such as hotel stationery, travel guides and advertisements, souvenirs and postcards – galvanizes my research. In according importance to this surplus material, I am in no way refuting the importance of the architectural drawings and architectural records, but rather to argue that a knowledge of this hotel is necessarily mediated by this experiencing subject’s firsthand encounter of such surplus material, and less through a

mastery of the architectural plans, sections, elevations or the architectural styles and forms.

Rather than examining this surplus material as an optional addendum to the conventional architectural archive, I argue that the former is more fundamental to one's knowledge of this hotel than the latter. In doing so, I also attempt to reclaim forms of evidence, especially the much denigrated and feminized anecdote, which is manifested as stories and gossip in this research, as central to the hotel's architectural narrative.⁵¹ Here, it is worth reiterating that the intimate encounter re-conceptualizes the commonly held definition of the 'primary source' being necessarily material previously unseen or locked away since the 'primary source', in this case, is what is fundamentally accessible, and *primary to*, the intimate encounter.

Dissertation Structure

Writing is making (the journey) *with*.⁵²

This dissertation is structured in three parts.

⁵¹ Critical work on the anecdotal in architectural discourse is presently scarce. For exceptions, see Penner, 'Researching Female Public Toilets', pp.81-98; Jane Rendell, 'Traveling the Distance: Encountering the Other', in David Blamey (ed.), *Here, There, Elsewhere: Dialogues on Location and Mobility* (London: Open Editions, 2002), pp.43-54.

⁵² Mireille Calle-Gruber, 'Afterword', in Susan Sellers (ed.), *The Hélène Cixous Reader* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp.207-20; here p.212.

Part One (*An Architecture of Intimate Encounter*) examines the thesis's theoretical and empirical contexts and develops a theory and practice of the architectural intimate encounter. Part Two (*Flora*) and Part Three (*Fauna*) unfold in two stages. Chapter 1 of *Flora* and *Fauna* describes the architectural encounter with each space, that is, the architectural materials presented by the hotel, this experiencing subject's interpretation of such material and the new architectural evidence, which surfaces through this experiencing subject's architectural encounter with the Palm Court and the Billiard Room. It develops the floral and animal plots by extrapolating metonymical and metaphorical relationships from a close reading of the intimate detail.

The second stage of *Flora* and *Fauna* re-orders the architectural interpretation of each space – using the floral plot of 'grafting' for the Palm Court and the animal plot of 'overturning' for the Billiard Room – to configure the hotel's architecture as a reinvigorated architectural subject of intimate encounter.

Chapter 2 of *Flora* develops a metonymic architectural typology for the Palm Court by reinterpreting this garden through its close association with Maugham and the writer's evocative notion of the 'exotic east', a description that Maugham himself bestows upon this hotel.⁵³

Chapter 2 of *Fauna* argues that the Billiard Room's architectural narrative is founded on stories and storytelling. It conducts a close reading of the animal anecdotes to tease out

⁵³ Maugham said that the Raffles Hotel stands 'for all the fables of the exotic east'. This statement is mentioned in many descriptions that recount the hotel's connection to Maugham. See for example, Flower, 'The Palm Courts of Maugham and Coward', p.161; Flower, *Year of the Tiger*, p.23; Sharp, *There is Only One Raffles*, p.106; Rebecca Lee and Andreas Augustin, *Secrets of an Old Lady: The Raffles Treasury* (Singapore: Treasury Publishing, 1988), p.18.

the grotesque feminized body in these stories, which critically ruptures the classical body of the colonial monument and its patriarchal subjects.

Flora and *Fauna* comprise two types of texts – an extensive academic argument and a shorter performative ‘text’, which constitutes what I call ‘spider-writing’. ‘Spider-writing’ involves the production of performative ‘texts’ articulated through words, as well as through the creation of inventive objects. The ‘spider-writing’ of the Palm Court and the Billiard Room – manifested in an archive of pressed flora, a series of love letters, a watchman’s memoirs and a set of model billiard tables – map other critical routes into these two architectural spaces, and creatively forefront this experiencing subject’s architectural encounter.

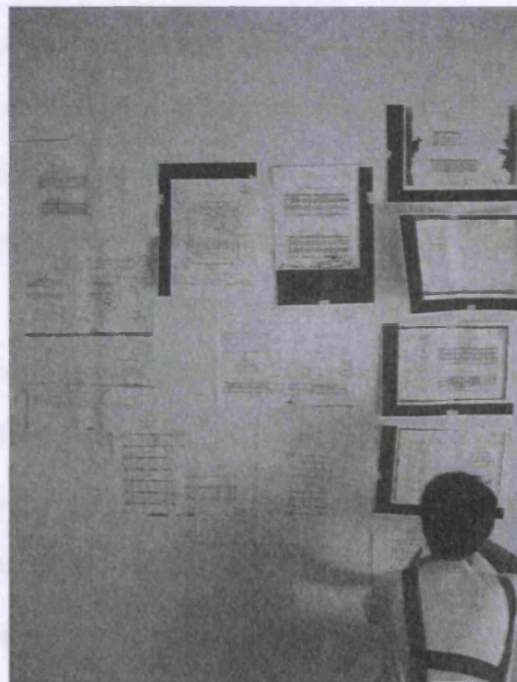
Working through academic methodologies, theoretical speculations and performative textual strategies, this thesis combines modes of theoretical, historical and inventive architectural interpretation and production. This research develops the theoretical contexts outlined earlier – that is, emphasizing the relational role of the experiencing subject, and privileging a mode of architectural interpretation conducted in a time-out-of-joint, which explores metonymical and metaphorical associations developed from a close reading of the intimate detail – towards achieving five main objectives.

It elucidates a theoretical framework that critically accounts for subject positions outside those of the architect’s. It questions the status of architectural evidence and expands the repertoire of objects relevant to architectural research. It employs modes of interpretation that draw on knowledge and techniques from architectural theory and history, literary criticism, feminist and postcolonial theories, experimental literary genres

and philosophical ideas. It takes the view that architectural history and theory is an imaginative spatial enterprise as much as it is a temporal one. And finally, it innovates an original interpretation of the hotel's architecture through its floral and animal plots, thus, moving beyond conventional architectural typology, traditionally limited to architectural forms and styles.

Part ONE

An Architecture of Intimate Encounter



1

Theoretical Contexts

How is the ‘architectural subject’ constituted by its experiencing subject? This question suggests that the ‘architectural subject’ is not an *a priori* entity, but a relational construction, which involves the ‘double subject’ of the experiencing subject, and the architectural subject matter with which she is engaged. In this chapter, I attempt to sketch a theoretical context, which places the agency of the experiencing subject who may be a theorist, historian, writer, reader, occupant, or an interested observer, for example, as central to the production and interpretation of architectural knowledge.

The term ‘experiencing subject’ explicitly delineates subject positions outside those of the architect’s, and implicitly promotes an investigation of architectural concepts and evidence not conventionally covered by architect-centred discourses.¹ As I have argued in the *Prologue*, an architect-centred discourse may be perceived as a masculine narrative, which privileges a single, usually male, architect as author. The notion of the ‘intimate encounter’, which I develop in this thesis, challenges the dominant architect-centred discourse by shifting the interpretation of architectural experience and meanings to other subject positions. Following a feminist epistemological underpinning, I argue that

¹ For a definition of an ‘architect-centred’ discourse, see *Prologue*, pp.19-20.

‘where’ we are placed in relation to our object of study determines ‘how’ we know and ‘what’ we know.²

The question, ‘How is the “architectural subject” constituted by its experiencing subject?’ necessitates a re-evaluation of the experiencing subject’s role in the construction of architectural meaning. A discussion of the relational and subjective process of signification will be conducted through literary theorist and psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva’s theory of ‘the semiotic’ and her concept of ‘women’s time’. One of the most significant contributions Kristeva makes is to challenge philosophy with the psychoanalytically motivated subject who is implicitly involved in the complex process of meaning-making. According to Kelly Oliver, Kristeva argues that:

... meaning is Other ... (and operates) beyond any individual subjectivity. Insofar as meaning is constituted in relationships – relationships with others, relationships with signification, relationships with our own bodies and desires – it is fluid. And the subject for whom there is meaning is also fluid and relational.³

For Kristeva, subjectivity is not defined as individual autonomy but posed as a negotiation between ‘the semiotic’ self and the ‘symbolic’ other. She suggests that the self is never a unified self but a split entity – a subject that is ‘always *both* semiotic and

² See Jane Rendell, ‘Architectural History as Critical Practice’, in Hilde Heynen and Jean-Louis Genard (eds.), *Critical Tools: International Colloquium on Architecture and Cities*, n.3, (Bruxelles, La Lettre Volée, forthcoming 2006); Jane Rendell, ‘Architecture-Writing’, in Jane Rendell (ed.) *Critical Architecture*, special issue of the *Journal of Architecture*, (June 2005), v.10. n.3, pp. 255-64; Jane Rendell, *The Pursuit of Pleasure: Gender, Space and Architecture in Regency London* (London: Athlone, 2002), pp.7-11.

³ Kelly Oliver, ‘Introduction: Kristeva’s Revolutions’, in Kelly Oliver (ed.), *The Portable Kristeva* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), pp.xi-xxix; here p.xviii.

symbolic' or what she calls a 'subject in process'⁴ – such that the act of signification, that is meaning-making, embeds *both* what is known to the collective law (what is 'symbolic', regulated, customary, conventional) *and* what is buried in the individual unconscious (what is 'semiotic', repressed, desired, bodily).⁵

Kristeva proposes that signification is not an (over)determined process, in which meaning is homogenously discovered and consumed. 'The text, in its signifying disposition and its signification', Kristeva argues, 'is a practice ... making visible the process underlying it'.⁶ Here, I am interested in the underlying process of architectural interpretation and research, which revolves around the experiencing subject. Thus, in my own use of the term 'architectural subject', I propose that 'subject' carries a double meaning: it refers to the *architectural object* examined and to the *person* in his/her encounter with architectural spaces, objects and experiences. This intentional ambiguity illustrates that the two 'subjects' are intertwined in definition.

My interest in Kristeva's concepts is also informed by her emphasis on recovering a relational and embodied subjectivity in textual interpretations, specifically in this case, for dealing with historical texts.⁷ Kristeva emphasizes that in the second half of the nineteenth century, what escaped the logic of how history could be understood and how

⁴ Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. Margaret Waller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), p.ix, p.22.

⁵ See Leon S. Roudiez, 'Introduction', in Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, p.4; Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, pp.25-30.

⁶ Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, p.233.

⁷ See Anne-Marie Smith, *Julia Kristeva: Speaking the Unspeakable* (London: Pluto Press, 1998), pp.2-3; John Lechte and Mary Zournazi, 'Introduction', in John Lechte and Mary Zournazi (eds.), *The Kristeva Critical Reader* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003), pp.1-10.

meanings were formulated, was the role of the subject in relation to this history.⁸ Her theory of signification aims to address this blindspot since it is ‘based on the subject, his formation, and his corporeal, linguistic and social dialectic’.⁹

Following Kristeva’s observation of historical discourse’s exclusion of the experiencing subject, I suggest that the experiencing subject has the potential to transform symbolic historical signification (‘the element of signification associated with position and judgment’) through the semiotic (‘the element of signification associated with drives and effects’),¹⁰ in order to reveal new objects of thought, critical epistemologies and arguments relationally formulated through her architectural encounter.¹¹

With the few exceptions mentioned in the *Prologue*, sustained methodological examinations into the critical role of the experiencing subject are scarce in architectural discourse.¹² This thesis takes on the challenge of developing a critical architectural theory and practice, which accounts for the role of the experiencing subject in architectural discourse. At the same time, I am also aware of the complexities and limitations of Kristeva’s thesis especially since its main modes of application have not been in architectural discourse but in the fields of literary criticism and art. Yet, it is important to note that her notion of ‘poetic language’ is not restricted to the study of the

⁸ Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, p.215.

⁹ Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, p.15

¹⁰ Oliver, ‘The Subject in Signifying Practice’, in Oliver, *The Portable Kristeva*, pp.23-6; here p.24.

¹¹ See Julia Kristeva, ‘Women and Literary Institutions’ (interview by Alice Jardine and Anne Menke), in Ross Mitchell Guberman (ed.), *Julia Kristeva: Interviews* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), pp.122-33; here p.124.

¹² I refer here to the architectural research of Iain Borden, Barbara Penner, Jonathan Hill, Adrian Forty, Jane Rendell, Katja Grillner, Jennifer Bloomer and Karen Bermann. See *Prologue*, pp.25-6, and this chapter, pp.60-75.

science of signs (also known as ‘semiology’ or ‘semiotics’) originally developed by Ferdinand de Saussure.¹³

Kristeva’s call for the consideration of the fluid ‘subject-in-process’ challenges the limitations imposed by the linguistic field, which ultimately ‘eliminates ... everything that cannot be systematized, structured, or logicized into a formal entity.’¹⁴ The term ‘language’ used by Kristeva refers to a communicative system. Hence, I argue that architectural discourse, writing, making and drawing are all language acts. It follows that Kristeva’s project of poetics is ‘to discover the possibilities of language; as an activity that liberates the subject from a number of linguistic, psychic, and social networks; as a dynamism that breaks up the inertia of language habits ...’.¹⁵ Her radical notion of poetic language with its particular emphasis on intertextuality¹⁶ and partisan

¹³ ‘Semiology’ or ‘semiotics’ is the science of signs developed by Saussure in 1916 to examine the meaning of signs within social life. During the Structuralist period in the 1960s, literary critic Roland Barthes proposed that semiotics was part of a linguistic discourse, and broadened the sign-systems to include images, gestures and melodic sounds. ‘Semiotics’ is used to describe the Anglo-American tradition that derives from the work of C.S. Pierce. For a short history of ‘semiotics’, see for example, Kaja Silverman, *The Subject of Semiotics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp.3-53.

¹⁴ Julia Kristeva, Jean-Claude Milner and Nicholas Ruwet (eds.), *Langue, Discours, Société* (Paris: Seuil, 1975), p.230, cited by Roudiez, ‘Introduction’, p.4. Kristeva’s ‘poetic language’ develops the earlier perspectives of Russian Formalist Ossiip Brik, who first coined the term ‘poetic language’ in 1917 to counteract the restrictive language of communication and included within his repertoire ‘transrational languages’, and linguist Roman Jakobson’s radical call that the poetic function should not be limited to poetry. See Roudiez, ‘Introduction’, p.2.

¹⁵ Julia Kristeva, *Recherches Pour Une Sémantique* (Paris: Seuil, 1969), pp.178-9, cited by Roudiez, ‘Introduction’, pp.2-3. Emphasis mine.

¹⁶ The concept of ‘intertextuality’ was developed by Kristeva in her study of Mikhail Bakhtin’s work on dialogue and carnival. Intertextuality suggests that a text is not a closed system and that textual interpretation and production do not operate in isolation but are influenced by, and in dialogue with, other texts, authors and readers. See Julia Kristeva, ‘Word, Dialogue and Novel’, in Toril Moi (ed.), *The Kristeva Reader*, trans. Alice Jardine, Thomas Gora and Léon S. Roudiez (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), pp.34-61; Michael Worton and Judith Still, ‘Introduction’, in Michael Worton and Judith Still (eds.), *Intertextuality: Theories and Practices* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), pp.1-44.

interpretation is, I suggest, relevant for rethinking architectural discourse, that is, to conceptualize how the experiencing subject may disrupt the symbolic order of objects, spaces, experiences and meanings encoded by this representational medium. This perspective opens architectural discourse to intertextual interpretations involving material – texts, documents, objects, spaces and subjects – located both within and outside of the architectural discipline itself.

Kristeva's notion of 'the semiotic' drive as a critical force for generating creative production has not been considered in architectural discourse. Nevertheless, her description of how the 'unrepresentable' semiotic drive 'discharges' itself, for example, through uncontrolled colours, rhythms, moods and pulsations,¹⁷ resonates with architectural experiential qualities. Architectural discourse is unique in that it is the textual intersection between what is encountered and what is discursively interpreted. And, mediating between the positions of encounter and interpretation is the experiencing subject.

Kristeva has suggested that interpretive acts, for example, the reading of literary texts or, as I contend, the interpretation of architectural spaces and discourses, inevitably involves psychoanalytic transference¹⁸ from the reader or the experiencing subject, to the text or to an architectural space, 'This occurs in every reading, regardless of how neutral it may claim to be'.¹⁹ She suggests that a critical recognition of this non-neutral process of unconscious transference may prompt 'a search for new and diverse spaces that can be

¹⁷ See John Lechte, *Julia Kristeva* (London: Routledge, 1991), p.132.

¹⁸ See also Julia Kristeva, 'Reading and Writing' (interview by Serge Gavronsky, 1987), in Guberman, *Julia Kristeva: Interviews*, pp.204-10; especially pp.205-7.

¹⁹ Julia Kristeva, 'General Principles in Semiotics' (interview by Pierre Oullet and Charles Bauer, 1976), in Guberman, *Julia Kristeva: Interviews*, pp.179-87; here p.187.

interpreted in the context of the subject's complex and critical experiences with meaning'.²⁰

It should be noted that although I recognize the importance of psychoanalysis in the context of Kristeva's work, this thesis does not play out a psychoanalytic approach. Instead, it extrapolates the experiencing subject's role, which Kristeva acknowledges as critical to meaning-making. I attempt to develop an architectural methodology that explores how the 'subject's complex and critical experiences with meaning' is played out in relation to a specific architectural object.

In this chapter, I expand for architectural discourse two aspects of Kristeva's theory. These aspects are: first, the relational role of the experiencing subject as contingent to the constitution of a (double) 'architectural subject', and second, a spatio-temporal context, which enables an embodied relational encounter to take place. These twinned notions are further reflected against an architectural context set up by four architectural theorists, with whose work I identify most closely in terms of research methodology. The aim is to develop a critical-creative theory and practice of architectural interpretation constructed through a relational encounter between the experiencing subject and the architectural object.

Locating 'The Semiotic' and 'The Feminine'

In *Revolution in Poetic Language*, Kristeva introduces two modes – 'the symbolic' and 'the semiotic' – which she argues are present in all psychical and signifying relations, through

²⁰ Kristeva, 'General Principles in Semiotics', p.187.

which the subject constructs meaning.²¹ The symbolic refers to the ‘organization of a social order according to the imperatives of paternal authority’, and includes the ‘order of law, language and exchange’ founded on a patriarchal norm, which represses the feminine and the maternal.²² The semiotic are bodily drives, energies and impulses that exist dialectically to the symbolic modes of signification. Drives are dualistic ‘forces that move between the body and representation’, and thus, confound the customary split between biology and society, or body and mind.²³ Kristeva draws a relationship of the semiotic to the Greek term ‘σημεῖον’ meaning ‘distinctive mark, trace, index, precursory sign, proof, engraved or written sign, imprint, trace, figuration’,²⁴ which suggests that unlike the symbolic encoded in law, culture and language, the semiotic exists as a trace, and in Kristeva’s terms, is subversive in character. According to feminist philosopher Elizabeth Grosz, Kristeva’s understanding of the semiotic is defined in relation to:

... (a) maternal space and energy subordinated by the law-like functioning of the symbolic, but, at times, breaching the boundaries of the symbolic in privileged moments of social transgression, when like the repressed, it seeks to intervene into the symbolic and subvert its operations.²⁵

The semiotic is linked primarily to the body but Kristeva stresses that the semiotic makes sense only if it negotiates with the symbolic domain and its thought structures. The

²¹ Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, pp.21-4.

²² Elizabeth Grosz, *Sexual Subversions: Three French Feminists* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1989), p.xxiii; also pp.47-9.

²³ Oliver, ‘Introduction’, p.xvii.

²⁴ Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, p.25.

²⁵ Grosz, *Sexual Subversions*, p.xxi.

signification process constitutes a dialectic that engages ‘drives and impulses on the one hand, the family and society structures on the other’.²⁶ In stating that ‘the subject is always both semiotic and symbolic’,²⁷ Kristeva meaningfully accounts for alternative expressions and interpretations, which operate outside symbolic communicative frameworks. The engagement with a patriarchal order, and the subversion of this order from *within*, that is, by generating subversive concepts and strategies from inside the symbolic framework itself as opposed to imposing an external force, is especially significant for my own research, since my architectural subject is embedded within a patriarchal structure of colonial architectural spaces, subjects and histories.

The semiotic is conceptualized as an excessive and relational maternal energy, which aims for pleasurable expenditure or what Kristeva calls *jouissance*,²⁸ a blissful abandonment nurtured by feminine qualities of ‘connivance *with*’,²⁹ that is, an identification with another subject through tenderness, love, sympathy, sensuality and vulnerability. Literary theorist Margaret Atack points out that the female subject is central to Kristeva’s theorization of transforming the symbolic order through the subject’s resistance.³⁰ For example, Kristeva herself stresses that the ‘feminine question could be compared to “the woman effect” ... (and) to the “maternal function”’ which ‘entails a specific relationship to both power and language’ that does not appropriate the

²⁶ Roudiez, ‘Introduction’, p.4.

²⁷ Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, p.24.

²⁸ For definitions of Kristeva’s *jouissance*, see Kristeva, ‘Reading and Writing’, p.204-6; Grosz, *Sexual Subversions*, p.xix; Julia Kristeva, ‘Barthes’s Voice’, in Diana Knight (ed.), *Critical Essays on Roland Barthes* (New York: G. K. Hall, 2000), pp.138-41. In ‘Barthes’s Voice’, Kristeva does not actually mention the word *jouissance* but her lucid description of Barthes’s text resonates with her definition of *jouissance* from the interview ‘Reading and Writing’.

²⁹ Kristeva, ‘Reading and Writing’, p.206.

³⁰ Margaret Atack, ‘The Other: Feminist’, in *Paragraph*, (1986), v.8, pp.25-39; here p.36.

symbolic order but subverts it through ‘silent’ and relentless ‘harassment’.³¹ However, as Grosz observes, although ‘the centrality of the maternal to all of Kristeva’s investigations provides a framework for examining the contributions of women, femininity, and female specificity to symbolic functioning’,³² Kristeva’s position towards the feminine as a term denoting sexual difference and specificity is problematically inconsistent and idiosyncratic.³³ For example, her ambivalence is marked by the simultaneous ‘skeptical distance and affirmation’ she maintains towards feminism, and her proposition that the feminine is a ‘sexual differentiation internal to each subject’ be this subject a man or a woman.³⁴

While Kristeva’s ambivalence towards a feminist stance is the issue of an ongoing debate that cannot be adequately addressed in this thesis, I argue following Attack and Grosz, that the semiotic may be couched as a critical feminine position, which operates as a radical critique of masculine subjectivity.³⁵ There are several instances in Kristeva’s argument where links between the semiotic and the feminine may be drawn.

³¹ See Julia Kristeva, “‘une femmes’: The Woman Effect’ (interview by Eliane Boucquey, 1975), in Guberman, *Julia Kristeva: Interviews*, pp.103-12; here p.104; and Lechte, *Julia Kristeva*, p.152: ‘... the avant-garde artist will be politically successful to the extent that he or she subverts the existing mode of the symbolic order, rather than engaging in an open ideological confrontation. ... in this way (it) becomes a permanent confrontation with the Law’.

³² Grosz, *Sexual Subversions*, p.71.

³³ For a critique of Kristeva’s attitudes towards the feminine and feminists, see Grosz, *Sexual Subversion*, pp.63-7, pp.91-9; Attack, ‘The Other: Feminist’, pp.25-39; Elizabeth Grosz, *Space, Time, and Perversion: Essays on the Politics of Bodies* (London: Routledge, 1995), p.76; Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics* (London: Routledge, 2003), pp.162-8. Moi presents a counter-argument to Grosz and Attack, and also to my own interpretation here.

³⁴ Grosz, *Sexual Subversions*, pp.66-7.

³⁵ Kristeva points out that sympathy, love and identification are the emotions that also take place in the first part of a psychoanalytic process where the analyst attempts to occupy the perspective of the analysand, the latter being habitually a female subject. See Kristeva, “‘une femmes’”, pp.103-5.

First, according to Kristeva, the semiotic is accommodated within a ‘nourishing and maternal’ *chora*, a definition she borrows from Plato.³⁶ Kristeva describes the *chora* as ‘a modality of signifiante’ regulated by, and privileging connections to the body.³⁷ Following Plato, she describes the semiotic as a generous, invisible and formless ‘support’ – a maternal spatial structure, which provides space for ‘all creative activity’ that fundamentally involves a ‘localization of the (unconscious) libido’ in a symbolic expression,³⁸ for example, in linguistics, philosophy, mathematics or, as I contend, architectural discourse. Kristeva proposes that ‘a creative act is a function ... of sexual *differentiation*’ between the symbolic masculine desire for mastery, logic and syntax, and the semiotic feminine identification with the unconscious and the maternal body.³⁹ Thus, rather than a negation of masculine or feminine, symbolic or semiotic, the creative act unfolds through a differentiation and negotiation between these different axes.

Second, the feminine relationship to power and language is not based on appropriation, mastery, confrontation or control. Echoing the first point made about the semiotic *chora*, Kristeva further suggests that the semiotic is a ‘modality of linguistic (and social) functioning of language’ that serves as ‘a source of silent support, a useful backdrop, and an invisible intermediary,’ and ‘heard in rhythms, intonation, and children’s echolalia as well as in artistic practice and in discourse that signifies less an “object” than a *jouissance*’.⁴⁰ Thus, the feminine interpretive mode works through conventionally

³⁶ Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, p.26. See also Oliver, ‘The Subject in Signifying Practice’, p.24; Lechte, *Julia Kristeva*, pp.128-9.

³⁷ Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, pp.27.

³⁸ Kristeva, “une femmes”, p.109.

³⁹ Kristeva, “une femmes”, p.109.

⁴⁰ Kristeva, “une femmes”, pp.104-5.

unacknowledged impulses, for instance, desire and intuition, which differentiates it from masculine approaches to knowledge.⁴¹

In this thesis, I locate the semiotic-feminine as a political category and a strategic mode of interpretation. For me, the semiotic is akin to a radical feminine thread woven through a patriarchal symbolic framework of discourse. My own understanding of the feminine refers both to the repressed but subversive term in a patriarchal symbolic order, and to a sexually differentiated 'method of knowing and positions of epistemological enunciation', which resists masculine paradigms marked by universal concepts and the totality of knowledge, and acknowledges the 'perspectival, partial, limited, and contestable ... historically specific (and) sexual' production of knowledge.⁴² As Grosz points out, the acknowledgement of the feminine as a sexually differentiated epistemological position allows for a 'transformation of the patriarchal alignments' that control 'representation, meaning and knowledge'.⁴³ 'A politics of difference,' Grosz asserts, 'implies the right to define oneself, others, and the world, according to one's own interest'.⁴⁴

In discussing the semiotic in the text, Kristeva suggests that it may be expressed as a creative 'style' of writing, or on a 'cognitive level', through a 'change in the objects of thought'.⁴⁵ While arguing that men have access to the creative semiotic as much as women do, Kristeva nonetheless insists that 'the tonality a woman would bring – in the

⁴¹ Kristeva, 'The Semiotic Chora: Ordering the Drives', in Oliver, *The Portable Kristeva*, pp.35-9; here p.38.

⁴² Grosz, *Space, Time, and Perversion*, p.41, p.42.

⁴³ Grosz, *Space, Time, and Perversion*, p.54.

⁴⁴ Grosz, *Space, Time, and Perversion*, p.54.

⁴⁵ Kristeva, 'Women and Literary Institutions', p.124.

way she presents a new object, or in the way she treats it – is totally particular’.⁴⁶ The critical effect of a feminine ‘tonality’ towards a conventionally masculine object of study is of particular relevance to this thesis in that it advocates the emergence of specific experiences and subjects, which challenge existing masculine knowledge paradigms structured around the architect and the identity of the nation, through the particularity of the experiencing subject’s encounter with her architectural subject matter.

The Spatio-Temporal Context in ‘Women’s Time’

I suggest that Kristeva’s work offers a spatio-temporal context, which enables the discharge of the semiotic drive. In *Women’s Time*, Kristeva posits that historical time as we currently understand it primarily follows a linear and teleological masculine model.⁴⁷ She contrasts this masculine historical time to a feminine spatio-temporal mode of existence, where time is significantly coupled with, and inseparable from space. Citing James Joyce’s ‘Father’s time, mother’s species’, Kristeva points out that ‘the evocation of women’s name and fate privileges the space that generates the human species more than it does time, destiny, or history’.⁴⁸ She offers two examples of this spatio-temporal context linked to what she calls ‘the problematics of “space”’.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Kristeva, ‘Women and Literary Institutions’, p.132.

⁴⁷ Julia Kristeva, ‘Women’s Time’, in Oliver, *The Portable Kristeva*, pp.351-71; here p.355. ‘Le Temps des femmes’ was originally published in *34/44: Cahiers de recherche de sciences des textes et documents*, no.5 and translated into English as ‘Women’s Time’ in *Signs* (Autumn, 1981).

⁴⁸ Kristeva, ‘Women’s Time’, p.353.

⁴⁹ Kristeva, ‘Women’s Time’, p.354.

Kristeva draws on psychoanalytic clinical findings, which argue for the link between a child's 'history', a stable adulthood and the provision of a secure 'maternal space'.⁵⁰ She also develops Plato's concept of *chora* as a model of 'women's (space)-time' by suggesting that *chora*, which is described as a 'matrixlike space that is nourishing, unnameable'⁵¹ is akin to the formless but subversive space of 'female subjectivity' that informs concepts of time experienced, for example, in mythical and religious cultures – contexts in which historical time is more readily dismantled.⁵²

Kristeva frames the spatio-temporal context of feminine subjectivity as one that contests the unity of the law and the symbolic (defined for example, by religion, civilization, nationhood and history), being itself 'prior to the One and to God'.⁵³ 'For the ancient Greeks', Oliver reminds us, '*chora* meant space, area or land. Kristeva uses it to mean the space in which drives enter language'.⁵⁴ According to Kristeva, drives enter language through resistance of the symbolic order, setting up a space marked by 'ruptures, absences and breaks' in language (the examples given by Kristeva include laughter and a child's utterance) and the introduction of themes uncommon to this order.⁵⁵ She stresses that feminine subjectivity counteracts 'linear time' by measuring 'temporality' according to 'the rhythm of nature', by emphasizing 'cycles' and 'gestations' which she argues are

⁵⁰ Kristeva, 'Women's Time', p.354.

⁵¹ Kristeva, 'Women's Time', p.354.

⁵² Kristeva alludes to the presence of the 'maternal cult' in religious myths, particularly the 'body of the Virgin Mother who does not die, but travels from one space to another within the same time frame'. See Kristeva, 'Women's Time', p.354.

⁵³ Kristeva, 'Women's Time', p.354.

⁵⁴ Oliver, 'The Subject in Signifying Practice', p.24.

⁵⁵ Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics*, p.169. See also Grosz, *Sexual Subversions*, pp.41-2.

‘experiences’ of time adopted by the modern feminist movement, and ‘intrinsically incompatible with “masculine” values’.⁵⁶

According to Kristeva, the temporal rhythms arising from female subjectivity are spatially ordered, and this spatio-temporal context is infinite, simultaneous and excessive:

As for time, female subjectivity seems to offer it a specific concept of measurement that essentially retains repetition and eternity out of the many modalities that appear throughout the history of civilization. On the one hand, this measure preserves cycles, gestation, and the eternal return of the biological rhythm that is similar to the rhythm of nature. ... On the other hand, it preserves a solid temporality that is faultless and impenetrable, one that has so little to do with linear time that the very term ‘temporality’ seems inappropriate. All-encompassing and infinite, like imaginary space ... [T]hese two types of temporality – cyclical and monumental – are traditionally associated with female subjectivity.⁵⁷

In her use of *chora*, Kristeva implies that this conceptual feminine space cultivates the unconscious impulse, the latter manifested in the *chora* as a spatial maternal ‘rhythm’ that disrupts the linear flow of cultural, historical time.⁵⁸ Although this ‘rhythm’ is only vaguely alluded to in Kristeva’s theory of signification, I suggest that ‘rhythm’ here refers less to a temporal attribute than it does to a particular *patterning* of space – for example,

⁵⁶ Kristeva, ‘Women’s Time’, pp.353-4.

⁵⁷ Kristeva, ‘Women’s Time’, p.354.

⁵⁸ It is unclear whether Kristeva assigns a gender to the unconscious although the *chora* is clearly a maternal space for her.

the space of a music score, a poem, an artwork, a drawing, a novel or a discursive text – that potentially interrupts chronological time. The spatial ‘rhythmic’ disruption to linear historical time is accorded with a feminine spatio-temporal context that, according to Kristeva, ‘poses a problem only with respect to a certain conception of time, that of time as planning, as teleology, linear and prospective development ... that is, the time of history’.⁵⁹

Here, although I see Kristeva’s assertion of history as primarily ‘teleological’ being an inaccurate comment,⁶⁰ I am interested in re-conceptualizing historical thinking through a spatial armature, that is, how architectural history, in my case, may be re-framed and broadened as a critical and imaginative spatial practice mediated by the intimate encounter. In an utopian description, Kristeva asserts that this feminine spatio-temporal context privileges ‘simultaneity with what is experienced as extra-subjective and cosmic time as a source of resplendent visions and unnameable *jouissance*’.⁶¹ In my view, her notion of simultaneity may have less to do with ‘the present’ than it has with the semiotic ‘rhythm’, that is, a spatial patterning that punctuates the linear flow of historical time. This is a radical revision of temporality, and particularly key for architectural research in that it conceptualizes time as ‘simultaneity with what is (spatially) experienced’. Here, I contend it is the encounter with architectural *space* and its non-linear juxtaposition of past, present and future time, which disrupts a linear, chronological concept of historical time.

⁵⁹ Kristeva, ‘Women’s Time’, p.355.

⁶⁰ For a feminine approach to history, chronology and power relations, see example, Michelle Perrot, ‘Women, Power and History’, in Michelle Perrot (ed.), *Writing Women’s History*, trans. Felicia Pheasant (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), pp.160-74.

⁶¹ Kristeva, ‘Women’s Time’, p.354.

By suggesting that feminine time is associated more closely with the cyclical gestation of the body and the monumental return of nature's rhythms, Kristeva complicates a conventional understanding of chronological and abstract temporality with a corporeal and relational spatio-temporal context. She also argues that the unconscious is out-of-time with historical temporality:

One is constantly situated between numerous temporalities. There is an extratemporal time; Freud says that the unconscious ignores time, that it is a form of eternity. The unconscious is a sort of exit out of chronological lines, and there it is our own regression, our own infantilism, which is called into play.⁶²

However, Kristeva does not link the feminine spatio-temporal context with a corporeal experience *per se*. In discussing the political possibilities open to the new generation of women in Europe in an interview conducted in 1987, she says, 'The meaning I am attributing to the word "generation" suggests less a chronology than a *signifying* space, a mental space that is at once corporeal and desirous'.⁶³ Thus, within this feminine space-time context, the experiencing subject may consider, equally, what is desirous to her through the projection of a mental space where a different form of meaning-making can take place. I emphasize this fluid spatio-temporal context, which Kristeva terms elsewhere 'extratemporal time', a 'breakdown in time, this time out of time' or, a 'return to present history'.⁶⁴ This spatio-temporal context provides an impetus for my own theorization of the experiencing subject's encounter with, and relational transformation

⁶² Kristeva, 'Reading and Writing', p.207.

⁶³ Kristeva, 'Women's Time', p.368.

⁶⁴ Kristeva, 'Reading and Writing', p.207.

of, historical architectural material, which is discussed at length in the forthcoming chapter, *An Architecture of Intimate Encounter*.

To recapitulate, I have examined Kristeva's notion of 'the semiotic' to understand the role of the experiencing subject in the construction of architectural meaning. Kristeva's theory of signification emphasizes that the experiencing subject is never outside of, nor can she remain objectively disinterested in the interpretive process. This recognition of the experiencing subject's contribution to architectural signification, I suggest, re-conceptualizes architectural discourse as a relational practice where the experiencing subject is central to the constitution of the 'architectural subject'. It reiterates the notion of the 'architectural subject' as a 'double subject', comprising the experiencing subject and her architectural object of encounter. I have also highlighted the specific spatio-temporal context that Kristeva calls 'women's time' as a context, which challenges masculine historical time. For now, I will reflect on these two aspects – the constitution of the 'architectural subject' by the experiencing subject, and the feminine spatio-temporal context – by considering the work of four architectural theorists, who have inspired and influenced my own research methods.

The Architectural Context (or, Four Muses)

In the last two and a half decades, feminist architectural research has shifted from taking solely as its object of study subjects dealing with women towards developing new interpretive methods that critically reconsider architectural representation, reproduction,

experience and use from perspectives outside those of the architect's, looking at these issues from within the discipline itself, and in relation to research on space and subjectivity developed in other disciplines like cultural geography, art history, literary criticism, anthropology, film theory, philosophy and cultural studies.⁶⁵ Although there may be no obvious signing of the work as 'feminist' in its subject matter, for example, the discourse may have nothing at all to do with women, I propose that feminist architectural research may be expanded to include interpretive modes that tease out, on the one hand, architectural issues that have been suppressed by patriarchal discourses, and on the other hand, the self-reflexive position of the experiencing subject. Such feminist research would register as critical to its epistemological process the relational attitudes of the experiencing subject towards her object of study.

To this end, I have selected four feminist architectural theorists whose work, I suggest, describe the architectural context for my own thesis on the intimate encounter theorized in the forthcoming chapter, *An Architecture of Intimate Encounter*. To my knowledge, the grouping of the four theorists in terms of how their discourse radically repositions the experiencing subject in relation to the architectural object, and their methods for re-appraising space and time in relation to the architectural encounter, constitutes an entirely new contribution to architectural discourse. I will briefly sketch out their

⁶⁵ For example, the edited collection of essays by Beatriz Colomina (ed.), *Sexuality and Space* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1992), claimed a central place for gender and feminist analysis in mainstream architectural discourse. Its contributors looked at architecture, amongst other methods, through the lenses of film and art theories, psychoanalysis, theories of deconstruction and cultural studies. Other equally important architectural collections dealing with gender include Diana Agrest, Patricia Conway and Leslie Kanes Weisman (eds.), *The Sex of Architecture* (New York: Henry N. Abrams, 1996), Duncan McCorquodale, Katerina Ruedi and Sarah Wigglesworth (eds.), *Desiring Practices: Architecture, Gender and the Interdisciplinary* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 1996), Jane Rendell, Barbara Penner and Iain Borden (eds.), *Gender Space Architecture: An Interdisciplinary Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2000). See also Rendell, *The Pursuit of Pleasure*, pp.7-11.

methodologies here with specific reference to two aspects central to this thesis, that is, the experiencing subject's role and revisions of spatio-temporal concepts in relation to the experiencing subject's architectural encounter.

Through a practice she calls 'site-specific writing,'⁶⁶ that is, the production of a performative text, which unfolds in relation to the experiencing subject's identification with both the material and psychological conditions of an encountered site, Jane Rendell proposes a relational method for architectural writing. Beginning from emotionally freighted objects and sites, for example, a family heirloom⁶⁷ or the place of her birth,⁶⁸ Rendell develops architectural interpretations that draw critically on her own biographical details, experiences, desires and childhood memories. She frames these personal aspects as inter-personal coordinates, which are defined in relation to other objects, spaces, persons and practices she architecturally encounters:

Each of the stories I tell are only possible because of the spaces they take place in. Certain forms of architecture offer possibilities of certain kinds of encounter to occur. Writing about what has occurred is not only the tracing of the story, but the creation of a new place in its own right.⁶⁹

For example, in a hybrid performative text, *To Miss the Desert*, Rendell reconstructs a nomadic childhood spent in the Middle East, an episode that is associatively triggered by

⁶⁶ See Rendell, 'Architecture-Writing', pp.255-64.

⁶⁷ See Jane Rendell, 'An Atlas of the Welsh Dresser', in Ken Ehrlich and Brandon Labelle (eds.), *Surface Tension: Problematics of Site*, (New York: Errant Bodies, 2003), pp.283-92.

⁶⁸ See Jane Rendell, 'An Embellishment', in Peg Rawes and Jane Rendell (eds.), *Spatial Imagination* (London: The Bartlett School of Architecture, UCL, 2005), pp.34-5.

⁶⁹ Rendell, 'An Atlas of the Welsh Dresser', pp.284-5.

her encounter with artist Nathan Coley's 'Black Tent', a tent-like structure installed in the premises of an existing cathedral.⁷⁰ She does not take the position of a critic surveying the tent from a knowledgeable distance. Here, Rendell pits her present encounter with the tent by associatively drawing on her own childhood experience in the Middle East and her professional life as an architectural designer. We are led through the tent by the enchanting voice of a child and the opaque language of architectural design. An architectural element, such as a door, wall or floor, takes on a different sensation each time it is spoken by these two different voices.

The following passage delineates the potential refuge, security and risks of the floor seen from the tactile perspective of a child, who crouches with glass jar in hand to watch insects moving across its vast surface. This perspective is contrasted against the exact but disembodied language of architectural specification:

In the centre: The floor in the hallway is hard and shiny, cold enough to cool a hot hand. At night, when her parents go out, she comes here to catch insects. Many creatures skulk across it, ants, spiders and other more sinister insects she doesn't yet know the names of. But as long as she is careful to catch them under a jar with a smooth edge, one that meets the marble without any gaps, she is safe to watch them.

14 FLOOR FINISHES

1. Location 1.5 and G5

⁷⁰ Jane Rendell, 'To Miss the Desert', in Gavin Wade (ed.), *Nathan Coley Black Tent* (Portsmouth: Art and Sacred Places, 2003), pp.34-43. The brief given to Rendell by artist-curator Gavin Wade was to produce a text in the form of a tabernacle – a structure that resonated with the ambiguous overtones of Coley's pseudo-religious construction.

Forbo Nairn lino sheeting 1.5mm to be laid on 6mm wbp ply sub floor. Ply and lino to run under appliances and around kitchen units. Colour tba by client. Aluminium threshold at junction with G2, G6 and 1.1...⁷¹

Rendell's presentation of the architectural object, through a creative 'biomorphologically'⁷² stylized text, in this case relating to a childhood memory, works to 'undo'⁷³ the 'known' architectural object (here, the floor). It also reveals the critical, if problematic, positioning of the experiencing subject in the epistemological process of constructing an 'architectural subject'. 'My aim appears constant,' Rendell explains, 'I seek to make manifest the position of the writing subject and her choice of objects of study and subject matters, processes of intellectual enquiry and creative production; but there have been shifts in my methods from the more dogmatic and literal attempt to produce a feminist Marxist architectural history to more lateral and metaphoric texts'.⁷⁴

In another piece of writing, Rendell explores architectural interpretation through strategic storytelling of personal family history mediated by her encounter with a family heirloom in the form of a Welsh dresser.⁷⁵ The dresser acts as a metaphorical device, where material objects such as jugs, keys, a diary and buttons found on its surface and in its

⁷¹ Rendell, 'To Miss the Desert', p.34.

⁷² '... I misremembered Lourde's (Audre) term "biomythography" as "biomorphology", or in my mind "the shape a life takes," reflecting my interest in autobiography as a kind of spatial writing or even a travelogue'. Rendell, 'An Atlas of the Welsh Dresser', p.284.

⁷³ Jane Rendell, 'Doing It, (Un)doing It, (Over)doing It Yourself: Rhetorics of Architectural Abuse', in Jonathan Hill (ed.), *Occupying Architecture: Between the Architect and the User* (London: Routledge, 1998), pp.229-46.

⁷⁴ Rendell, 'Architecture-Writing', p.256.

⁷⁵ Rendell, 'An Atlas of the Welsh Dresser', pp.283-92. Rendell also uses 'biomorphological' storytelling in Jane Rendell, 'Traveling the Distance: Encountering the Other', in David Blamey (ed.), *Here, There, Elsewhere: Dialogues on Location and Mobility* (London: Open Editions, 2002), pp.43-54.

drawers are spatially engaged through personal stories and associatively juxtaposed against concepts and critical perspectives about architectural space, subjectivity and the production of architectural history through use and experience. Sifting through the varied contents of the dresser, Rendell puzzles over how the various positions she occupies as critic, theorist, writer, historian and/or occupant shape her understanding of time and space:

To attach one event to another and to explain their connection is the job of the historian. Writing history through an engagement with a series of objects provides an interesting material and spatial structure to the usually temporal chronology.⁷⁶

Rendell reminds us that a spatio-temporal sequence is not fixed, but depends on how the experiencing subject relates to an architectural setting:

In sequence or in juxtaposition, what happens to things when they are next to one another? As my grandfather, the butcher, lay in his dark coffin, tea and tongue sandwiches were served from the Welsh dresser in the room next door.⁷⁷

The House Behind,⁷⁸ Karen Bermann's psychosomatic architectural excursion into the secret annex of Prinsengracht 263, more famously known as Anne Frank's House,

⁷⁶ Rendell, 'An Atlas of the Welsh Dresser', pp.288-9.

⁷⁷ Rendell, 'An Atlas of the Welsh Dresser', p.288.

⁷⁸ Karen Bermann, 'The House Behind', in Heidi J. Nast and Steve Pile (eds.), *Places Through the Body* (London: Routledge, 1998), pp.165-80.

reconstructs a hiding space through an analytically inventive⁷⁹ and sympathetic reading of Frank's diary as a spatial document. This is not an easy or natural resolution considering that the diary was not originally written as an architectural document. Berman's piece challenges the historical transparency of conventional architectural methods represented for example, by architectural drawings, or investigations of established architectural typologies, forms and styles, as she layers these architectural methods with physical, psychological, and social complexities embedded in the house and its occupants. The architectural text's kinetic rhythm reflects what Bermann sees as a 'mobile homeland' – the secret annex that is part physical, part psychical, part building and part diary, '*Het Achterhuis*, the House behind, the double interior of *hiding and writing*, is an ark of sorts, a mobile homeland. ... This dwelling, this place, can move'.⁸⁰

Refusing to enter the house through the cutaway axonometric drawing obtained from the Anne Frank Foundation,⁸¹ Bermann's textual presence is intentionally light. She is openly sympathetic to the diary writer whose position she shadows:

A book with a red-and-white-checked cover, pulled from the drawer and written in quietly while others nap. ... Diary-writing is a near-silent act of inscription ... in which the one who reads is always a friend ...⁸²

⁷⁹ See Bermann's definition of 'analysis' as 'to dissolve, undo' and its relationship with invention in Karen Bermann, 'Pre-Architecture Studio: The Pattern Project', in *Journal of Architectural Education*, (May 2002), v.4, n.55, pp.268-71; here p.271.

⁸⁰ Bermann, 'The House Behind', p.175.

⁸¹ Bermann, 'The House Behind', p.167.

⁸² Bermann, 'The House Behind', p.170.

Instead of taking the position of authority, Bermann's interpretation remains sensitive to the young girl's world where invention is key – 'a new world ... invented from the materials at hand'.⁸³ She is engaged in understanding the psychological and imaginative underpinnings of the secret annexe, which acts on the architectural perception of a contemporary experiencing subject like herself. 'The diary is the alternate location, and writing an act of making distance', Berman reminds us, 'of constructing another place. This writing is a generative act, constituting as well as recording the movements of becoming'.⁸⁴ I gravitate to this text particularly because Bermann's 'act of making a distance' through architectural discourse is not based on disinterested judgment of her own architectural encounter with Frank's diary and house but by 'constructing another place', which is constituted through a network of physical, material, cultural and psychological associations⁸⁵ that she, as an experiencing subject, brings to her interpretation of the house.

The House Behind does not offer a conclusive architectural interpretation nor seek to reveal the 'truths' behind the historical material encountered. The essay is committed to finding ways of understanding Bermann's own architectural encounter. It layers the space of the annexe with an associative network of other hiding spaces for example, shawls, couches, boxes, breasts and dollhouses. Unlike the architectural axonometric that purports to master, make evident and name each space, Bermann's text is both provisional and expansive. It unfolds through her relationship, as an experiencing subject, with the diary and the occupant, whilst interpreting the architecture of the

⁸³ Bermann, 'The House Behind', p.174

⁸⁴ Bermann, 'The House Behind', p.173.

⁸⁵ Bermann, 'Pre-Architecture Studio', p.269. See also Bermann's 'Grief Monument' on <http://www.public.iastate.edu/%7ekbermann/homepage.html> (Accessed on 21 March 2006).

‘house behind’ as a metonymic web, that is, a spatial configuration which reflects her own epistemological journey into this space.

Katja Grillner’s work also consciously rethinks the production of architectural history in relation to the contemporary experiencing subject’s architectural encounter. Grillner is interested in how architectural knowledge is constituted through modes of encounter with an architectural site.⁸⁶ She describes this interpretive experience through the concept of ‘scene’, that is, a creative and discursive production of an architectural text in relation to an architectural ‘topography’, which takes into account the physical, cultural and psychological aspects of a particular site.⁸⁷ In *Writing and Landscape – Setting Scenes for Critical Reflection*, an article that revisits the topographically motivated structure of Grillner’s doctoral thesis,⁸⁸ she suggests that critical writing is ‘inherently architectural, or topographical’ and it is the specificity of such topographies that determine the ‘nature of (its) discourse’.⁸⁹

In her thesis, a speculative topography is constructed to set the discursive scene for dialogues on ‘representation, imagination, fiction and reality’.⁹⁰ These issues are derived from, and addressed within, the space of Hagley Park, an eighteenth-century landscape garden that still exists today. Taking the park as the scene of philosophical-architectural dialogue, three ‘actors’ are cast in an architectural script that challenges normative boundaries of historical time – Grillner herself as an architect-researcher articulating

⁸⁶ Katja Grillner, ‘Writing and Landscape – Setting Scenes for Critical Reflection’, in *The Journal of Architecture*, (Summer 2003), v.8, pp.239-49; Katja Grillner, ‘Out of Focus (in Distraction)’, in Rawes and Rendell, *Spatial Imagination*, pp.10-11.

⁸⁷ Grillner, ‘Writing and Landscape’, p.239.

⁸⁸ Katja Grillner, *Ramble, Linger and Gaze – Dialogues from the Landscape Garden* (PhD dissertation, KTH, 2000).

⁸⁹ Grillner, ‘Writing and Landscape’, p.239.

⁹⁰ Grillner, ‘Writing and Landscape’, p.242.

from her position in 1999 and two historical figures, eighteenth-century writers of gardening theory Thomas Whately and Joseph Heely who occupy their own historical times respectively of 1770 and 1777.

The dialogue takes place in one day as they walk through the park encountering the grotto, the rotunda, the ruins, the hermitage, as well as numerous prospects and views. Rather than documenting the past chronologically, Grillner's approach to the historical settings of her co-actors and the park is far more complex. For her, architectural history is 'a process where points of view intersect and evolve across real and imaginary landscapes'⁹¹ and the garden provides a site in which 'language, thought and material groundwork' unfold within boundaries that are more ambiguous and transient, 'Here, the building was a point, a position, on the undulating ground and its nature was shifting depending on the way you approached it'.⁹² The dialogic mode of discourse traces a passage, what Grillner describes as 'a movement *across* logos',⁹³ which 'widens the discursive possibilities of a text'.⁹⁴

Grillner treats the park less as an object than as 'an epistemological figure of thought', which emerges through her architectural encounter with the site, and constructs a 'discourse (that is) present in the here and now of my own, and the reader's

⁹¹ Grillner, 'Writing and Landscape', pp.240.

⁹² Grillner, *Ramble, Linger and Gaze*, p.12, cited by Grillner, 'Writing and Landscape', pp.239-40.

⁹³ Grillner brings up two possible definitions of 'dialogue' following Michael Princes' definition – the first premised on mastery and an overarching narrative, the second, 'emphasizes the prefix *dia-* in its meaning of transition or passage, thereby focusing on the activity being pursued ...'. Paraphrased from Michael Prince, *Philosophical Dialogue in the British Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp.1-20, cited by Grillner, 'Writing and Landscape', p.244.

⁹⁴ Grillner, 'Writing and Landscape', p.244.

imagination'.⁹⁵ The historical specificity of each actor is maintained so that architectural issues find their footing through a performative 'movement' carried out by the meeting of these actors and their site-specific dialogues.⁹⁶ Instead of arriving at a single viewpoint, such a movement knowingly problematizes the partial 'points of view'⁹⁷ in a subjective encounter. In addition, Grillner acknowledges herself – the experiencing subject – as implicated in the construction of these scenes. She is never out of the picture and this aspect is continually problematized as part of her architectural critique:

... her questions are driven by a double agenda: her desire to understand the thinking of their world and her concerns with crucial questions of her own time
... She never takes on their perspectives entirely, but interprets, intervenes, objects and suggests.⁹⁸

I am drawn to the associative links that Grillner develops from her own encounter with the site. This associative method, I suggest, accommodates architectural interpretations that escape normative historical periodization, spatial typologies and attention to architectural styles and forms *per se*. The architectural 'scene', that is, the park, juxtaposes in the architectural encounter – the past and the present, the physical and the imagined, fact and fiction. Grillner's construction of another 'space', which operates outside a chronological historical discourse is key. In another text concerning Stockholm's Haga Park, Grillner discloses that her architectural knowledge does not ignore 'the Haga Park that follows me around,' but that the park is understood instead as

⁹⁵ Grillner, 'Writing and Landscape', pp.239-40.

⁹⁶ 'The continuous link between the dialogue and the garden produces a narrative movement *around* its central questions'. Grillner, 'Writing and Landscape', p.239.

⁹⁷ Grillner, 'Writing and Landscape', p.240.

⁹⁸ Grillner, 'Writing and Landscape', p.241.

‘a place which expands, evolves, even disappears in part over time’.⁹⁹ In interpreting Hagley Park, rather than using the habitual compare-and-contrast epistemological model to align the three historical moments – 1770, 1777 and 1999 – Grillner allows each moment to unfold independently. Her approach here mirrors the strategies employed in the text on Haga Park where she reflects on the ‘rich and complex relationship’¹⁰⁰ with the site that ‘holds memories from several different “habitual perceptions” from different times, and ... also (from her) ... historical knowledge of the site’.¹⁰¹ For me, Grillner’s ‘philosophical dialogues’¹⁰² mark a fundamental shift away from the experiencing subject’s disinterested objectivity in her ‘architectural subject’. It re-frames architectural history as an imaginative spatial endeavour, which juxtaposes the experiencing subject’s contemporary space and time, the issues and subjects that interest her, and her own experiences against her interpretation of historical objects and spaces.

Jennifer Bloomer focuses on the reproduction of architecture through use and experience, deriving what she calls ‘minor architecture’, which:

... will operate in the interstices of this (major) architecture. Not opposed to, not separate from, but upon/within/among: barnacles, bastard constructions (une bâtarde architecture), tattoos (ornament, embellishment).¹⁰³

⁹⁹ Grillner, ‘Out of Focus’, p.11.

¹⁰⁰ This complex mode of encounter is also reflected in Grillner’s journey through Stockholm’s Haga Park. See Grillner, ‘Out of Focus’, p.11.

¹⁰¹ Grillner, ‘Out of Focus’, p.11.

¹⁰² Grillner, ‘Writing and Landscape’, pp.243-5.

¹⁰³ Jennifer Bloomer, *Architecture and the Text: The (S)cripts of Joyce and Piranesi* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), p.36. The notion of ‘minor architecture’ may be linked to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s concept of ‘minor language’. Deleuze and Guattari understand minor language not as that of the minority (for example, the use of Czech over German), but the rise of an individual language in a sea of major

Bloomer suggests that minor architecture is made out of ‘ambiguous objects’¹⁰⁴ that dislocate the architectural text, which always speaks from a position of majority, ‘This vaguely minor architecture is an assemblage of partial objects, a tesseraic text, a patchwork’.¹⁰⁵ Using allegory as a deconstructive method to reclaim repressed architectural knowledge, Bloomer acknowledges her own role as a desirous experiencing subject.¹⁰⁶ She points out, through Frederic Jameson, that allegory is located at the intersection of the personal and the political, and supports the return of the repressed.¹⁰⁷ Through the allegorical method, we tell one thing through another thing such that architecture constructed through allegory is at once real but also speculative by drawing attention to the ‘as if’.¹⁰⁸ The allegorical relationship does not follow cause-and-effect.¹⁰⁹ It is supplementary.¹¹⁰ It is associative, and as a kind of ‘extended metaphor’, allegory operates by the principle of absence, that is, by sustaining ‘the absence of a given term indefinitely’.¹¹¹ It follows that the associative mode of allegory also enables a surfacing of

languages. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, trans. Dana Polan (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), pp.17-19.

¹⁰⁴ Bloomer, *Architecture and the Text*, p.41.

¹⁰⁵ Bloomer, *Architecture and the Text*, p.41.

¹⁰⁶ See also Jennifer Bloomer, ‘The Matter of the Cutting Edge’, in McCorquodale, Ruedi and Wigglesworth, *Desiring Practices*, pp.11-31; Jennifer Bloomer, ‘D’Or’, in Colomina, *Sexuality and Space*, pp.163-84.

¹⁰⁷ Frederic Jameson suggests that third-world texts conflate the libidinal (personal, private, unconscious) and the political (collective, world of classes). ‘All third-world texts are necessarily, I want to argue, allegorical, and in a very specific way: they are to be read as what I will call national allegories’. Frederic Jameson, ‘Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism’, in *Social Text* (1986), n.15, pp.65-88; here p.69, cited by Bloomer, *Architecture and the Text*, p.49.

¹⁰⁸ Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), pp.5-8.

¹⁰⁹ Bloomer, *Architecture and the Text*, p.37.

¹¹⁰ Bloomer, *Architecture and the Text*, p.71.

¹¹¹ Silverman, *The Subject of Semiotics*, pp.112-3.

what is absent or repressed. Calling her allegorical architectural text a ‘tattoo’¹¹² – a bodily motif architect Adolf Loos condemned as degenerate and primitive – Bloomer embellishes the architectural text with her own passions as an experiencing subject. Thus, her allegorical architecture may be seen as a semiotic moment that interrupts the symbolic order in a bid to reclaim a discursive voice not otherwise available to architectural discourse.

The Latin word *emblema* means ‘inlaid work’, like mosaic (made of bits of stone) or like certain (‘primitive’) forms of jewelry. ... The Latin word emerged from the Greek *emballein*, which means ‘to throw in’. The act of making a pot or a jug or a [VESSEL] is called throwing. Twisting fibres into thread, which is then wound about the *rochetto*, a shuttling projectile [ROCKET] used to make textiles, is also called a throwing. Throwing is casting, as in casting a fishing line (which describes a trajectory) or casting a shadow (which describes a projection). To throw up is to evacuate the stomach of contents.¹¹³

In the passage above, which should be ‘looked at *and* listened to’,¹¹⁴ Bloomer weaves a network of meanings and spaces from the ‘emblem’ through a series of deconstructive and associative moves. She explores the ‘emblem’ through its verbal and visual associations and traces slippages in its multiple meanings and contexts to retrieve what is repressed. Bloomer also describes her architectural text as somewhere habitable:

¹¹² Bloomer, *Architecture and the Text*, p.42.

¹¹³ Bloomer, *Architecture and the Text*, pp.37-8.

¹¹⁴ Samuel Beckett, ‘Dante ... Bruno. Vico ... Joyce’, in *Our Exagmination Round His Factification for Incamination of Work in Progress* (Paris: Shakespeare and Company, 1929), p.14, cited by Bloomer, *Architecture and the Text*, p.7.

... script and crypt enjoy a confluence, which will be called *scrypt*, a signifier for this hole, this writing of something that is empty space, where something is kept secret or sacred – something unspeakable or unrepresentable – is kept, a holey space.¹¹⁵

I am drawn to Bloomer's text because it resonates with details of her own encounter with the architectural object. For example, historical facts involving James Joyce and Giambattista Piranesi – two characters central to Bloomer's architectural encounter – are passionately mediated by her own obsessions with the biographical details of these characters which have been repressed by architectural discourse but are key to her interpretation of their work. These details include Piranesi's melancholic disposition, supposedly precipitated by a childhood fall,¹¹⁶ and Joyce's expressive eyes hidden 'behind thick lenses', which appeal to Bloomer as they are 'unfocused and slightly crossed, a hint that they are full of darkness and shadow'.¹¹⁷ Bloomer's interest in the centrality of such private details in architectural epistemology extends to her willingness to put her own details at risk, arguing that they are meaningful in her constitution of architectural knowledge as an experiencing subject:

... I'm tired of the conventions that keep discussions of epistemology, or James Joyce, segregated from meditations on what is happening outside my window or inside my heart. The public-private dichotomy, which is to say, the public-private hierarchy, is a founding condition of female oppression.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ Bloomer, *Architecture and the Text*, p.48.

¹¹⁶ Bloomer, *Architecture and the Text*, p.52.

¹¹⁷ Bloomer, *Architecture and the Text*, p.5.

¹¹⁸ Bloomer, *Architecture and the Text*, p.167.

In another text ‘... and *venustas*’, Bloomer discusses the taboo subject of beauty across this personal-public divide, that is, writing across factual aspects and metaphorical associations on the subject of ‘skin’, on the one hand, and six semi-autobiographical stories, on the other hand.¹¹⁹ Mining for beauty beyond the visual and arguing against the pun that ‘beauty is only skin-deep’, Bloomer introduces the possibility of other sensorial modes of knowing namely touch, taste and smell. Significantly, it is the garden – a space that is perceived as ornamental and often gendered feminine – that Bloomer turns to, in order to make space for such passionate moments of knowing. In this space, she encounters architectural knowledge through a speculative rendezvous with Louis Sullivan’s ghost on a visit to his garden, and engaging this architectural subject with a childlike curiosity. Significantly, Bloomer’s garden is an atmospheric site, a space alluded to, and provoked by, associative connections.

...

To recapitulate, through my reading of Kristeva’s theory of signification involving the subject and her call for a feminine spatio-temporal context that challenges chronological historical time, this chapter delineates a new theoretical context for architectural history and theory, which reconsiders the constitution of the ‘architectural subject’ through the experiencing subject’s encounter with her architectural object of study. It brings Kristeva’s work from literary criticism into architectural discourse, in order to formulate an original and expanded notion of an architectural ‘feminist’ context. To this end, I also examined the contributions of four architectural theorists whose work, I argue,

¹¹⁹ Jennifer Bloomer, ‘... and *venustas*’, in *AA Files*, (Summer 1993), n.25, pp.3-9.

revolve around the architectural encounter and a feminine spatio-temporal framework. I will go on to develop a theory and practice for ‘an architecture of intimate encounter’, which relates to the theoretical contexts delineated here. This method also creatively transforms the thesis’s empirical contexts – concerning the architectural monument, architectural identity and the architectural typology of a hotel – which are outlined in the following chapter.

2

Empirical Contexts

In this thesis, the architectural subject of intimate encounter – that is, the ‘double subject’ constituted by this experiencing subject and her architectural object of study – revolves around the Raffles Hotel, a well-known colonial edifice, which is still in operation in contemporary Singapore. (Figs.1.2.1-1.2.2) This chapter aims to establish some background information about the hotel for the reader unfamiliar with this architectural landmark. It sets out to define the hotel’s architectural modalities – on the one hand, a National Monument since 1987 with a formal architectural history recorded by Singapore’s heritage and archive custodians, and on the other hand, as an architecture with a speculative and embellished past premised on anecdotal evidence. Although the latter mode is not normally associated with the hotel’s architectural narrative, I argue that this mode is key to the intimate encounter, and central to the construction of the ‘architectural subject’ related to this hotel.

Here, I draw on three kinds of published sources – the hotel’s own resource of published historical monographs and private recollections penned by commissioned researchers and a previous manager respectively, which offer a comprehensive account about its past,¹ a historical survey about the Armenian community of Singapore in the late-

¹ Historical monographs commissioned by the hotel are: Ilisa Sharp, *There is Only One Raffles: The Story of a Grand Hotel* (London: Souvenir Press, 1981); Raymond Flower, *Year of the Tiger* (Singapore: Times Books International, 1986); Gretchen Liu, *Raffles Hotel* (Singapore: Landmark Books, 1999), hereafter cited as ‘Liu,

nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, which deals with the history of the hotel from the perspective of its Armenian founders,² and architectural guidelines, drawings, texts and documents issued by the Preservation of Monuments Board (PMB) and the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA), for the restoration and preservation of the National Monument.³



1.2.1 Restored front façade of Main Building by R. A. J. Bidwell, with the hotel's Sikh watchman in foreground.

Raffles Hotel (1999)'; Gretchen Liu, *Raffles Hotel* (Singapore: Editions Didier Millet, 2006), hereafter cited as 'Liu, *Raffles Hotel* (2006)'. Other publications and private recollections inspired by the hotel are: Roberto Pregarz, *Memories of Raffles: 22 Years With a Grand Old Hotel* (Singapore: Treasury Publishing, 1990) (Pregarz was the hotel's manager between 1972-1989); Raymond Flower, *Raffles: The Story of Singapore* (Beckenham: Croon Helm, 1984); Rebecca Lee and Andreas Augustin, *Secrets of an Old Lady: The Raffles Treasury* (Singapore: Treasury Publishing, 1988).

² Nadia H. Wright, *Respected Citizens: The History of Armenians in Singapore and Malaysia* (Victoria, Australia: Amassia, 2003).

³ URA and PMB guidelines: *Raffles Hotel Preservation Guidelines* (Vol.1) (Singapore: Urban Redevelopment Authority and Preservation of Monuments Board, June 1997); *Objectives, Principles and Standards for Preservation and Conservation* (Singapore: Urban Redevelopment Authority and Preservation of Monuments Board, August 1993). Heritage publications: M. Gretchen, *Pastel Portraits: Singapore's Architectural Heritage* (Singapore: Singapore Coordinating Committee, 1984), pp.138-40; Robert Powell, *Living Legacy: Singapore's Architectural Heritage Renewed* (Singapore: Singapore Heritage Society, 1997), pp.176-83; Gretchen Liu, *In Granite and Chunan: The National Monuments of Singapore* (Singapore: Landmark Books, 1996), pp.230-41.



1.2.2 Location of Raffles Hotel in Singapore's 'Colonial District'.

I also consider two kinds of historical archives related to the hotel – a collection of architectural drawings that form part of the National Archives of Singapore (NAS) collection, which is categorized as material under restricted access,⁴ and a selection of artifacts and documents constituting part of the hotel's in-house museum, which is open to the general public.⁵ The National Archives is the official custodian of the nation's heritage. Its holdings consist primarily of historical documents relating to the government's 'corporate memory', that is, government and public records. Its primary aim is to 'house the collective memory of the nation'. Photographs, postcards and architectural drawings relating to the Raffles Hotel form a small part of the National Archives' patchy collection of material sourced from private organizations and

⁴ See: <http://www.nhb.gov.sg/NAS/WhoWeAre.htm> (Accessed on 7 May 2006).

⁵ See: <http://www.raffleshotel.com/leisure/museum.php> (Accessed on 7 May 2006).

individuals. The Raffles Hotel Museum opened in 1991 and is located on the third floor of the Raffles Hotel Arcade, a new-built shopping wing on North Bridge Road. (Fig.1.2.3) The museum contains ephemera related to tropical travel in Singapore and other locations in the British empire as well a patchy selection of anecdotal material related to the hotel's past for example, old maps, guidebooks, fictions, postcards, letters, signed photographs, newspaper reports and cartoons. There is no admission charge, and unlike many parts of the hotel, which are restricted to guest use, the museum is open to the general public from 10am to 7pm daily.



1.2.3 Raffles Hotel Museum at the Raffles Hotel Arcade.

To date, there is no dedicated, comprehensive, and/or critical published architectural history of the Raffles Hotel. This lack may be attributed to two factors. First, architectural research dedicated to Southeast Asian architecture is still in its nascent stages since many of the countries in this region achieved self-governance relatively late

in the second half of the twentieth century.⁶ Second, in an effort to consolidate nationhood through architectural identity, architectural research in the Southeast Asian context has tended to focus on themes and typologies of national and public interest, for example public housing and urban development.⁷ As the Raffles Hotel is a privately owned building, and has only been recently designated as a National Monument in the last two decades, its architectural discourse is not fully established. However, there is a dominant architectural theme emerging from these different published sources and archives, which I will highlight and closely interpret in this discussion.

It should be noted that the normative status of architectural evidence based on architectural drawings, documents and a history of the architect, as well as historiographical conventions that demand a dependence on primary and secondary sources, are aspects which are challenged in the context of this research. This situation arises from the centrality of non-traditional architectural evidence encountered by this experiencing subject and derived from use and experience of its spaces. This type of

⁶ Dates in bracket denote starting date of self-governance. British colonies included Malaysia (1957), Singapore (1965), Brunei (1984), Myanmar (1948); French colonies included Cambodia (1953) and Vietnam (1954); Indonesia achieved independence from Dutch rule in 1945; Portuguese East Timor became self-governing in 1975, and the Philippines was occupied by the Americans until 1946.

⁷ For example, speakers in the second Modern Asian Architectural Network (mAAN) conference, 'Towards Modern Asian Architecture' hosted by the National University of Singapore (4-6 September 2002), focused national development and identity. Papers included: 'Modernity and Modernities: Universalism and Particularism of Modernity in Modern Asian Architectural Research'; 'Tropical Architecture and Identity – A Derivative Discourse?'; 'Integrating Nuances of Local Urban Environmental Characteristics and Community for High-rise High-density Living', and 'From National Form to Regional Style'. See http://www.arch.nus.edu.sg/cpd_courses?cpd2002/maan/intro.htm (Accessed on 12 June 2006). The theme of architecture and identity has also inspired specific academic conferences, for example, the 'Architecture and Identity' conference hosted by the Berlin University of Technology (6-8 December 2004), which is tied to current architectural research exploring the relationship between architecture, cultural and regional identity in five geographical regions namely, Singapore, Mexico, Brazil, India and the Middle East. See http://www.architecture-identity.de/conference_home.htm (Accessed on 12 June 2006).

evidence comprises varied objects and ‘texts’ – including details relating to the hotel’s occupants (for example, biographical material), fictions, furniture, plants, animals, children’s stories, illustrated humour, newspaper articles and gossip.

As argued in the *Prologue*, the notion of ‘primary’ source is understood as material primary to the architectural encounter.⁸ This thesis takes the view that it is not just the content of the material, which should be finely analyzed but equally key to architectural knowledge is the context in which the experiencing subject encounters this material – for example as fiction, biography, gossip, or children’s story. It is suggested that these contexts offer an array of concepts, subjects and experiences that lie outside of, and which ultimately challenge perspectives based on an architect-centred inquiry. The research emphasizes the importance of understanding the speculative nature of this ‘archive’, and thus, its interpretation is necessarily discursive, partisan, limited and to some extent, speculative, although any speculation is rigorously argued for. The approach implicitly critiques the construction of a foundational architectural history which locates this hotel within a nation-building agenda and limits its architectural discourse to themes related to national and/or regional identities.

A Colonial Monument: An Introduction to the History of the Raffles Hotel

In 1887, two Armenian hoteliers who were already proprietors of the Eastern and the Oriental hotels in Penang, an island located off the northwestern Malay peninsular,

⁸ See *Prologue*, pp.37-8.

decided to cater to Singapore's burgeoning demand for good quality temporary accommodation. By this time, Singapore had already established itself as a thriving port city (Fig.1.2.4) and was the administrative government capital of the British Straits Settlements, a crown colony that comprised the three British trading posts of Singapore, Malacca (another Malayan state) and Penang, which geographically dominated the lucrative shipping route along the North-South axis of the Malacca Straits.⁹ (Fig.1.2.5)



1.2.4 The Singapore River c.1860s.

⁹ Singapore was absorbed into the Straits Settlement in 1826 by the East India Company. The Straits Settlement was handed over to the Colonial Office in London in 1867 as part of the British Crown Colony. For historical background into the Singapore's history as part of the British Straits Settlement, see for example, Ernest C. T. Chew, 'The Foundation of a British Settlement', in Ernest C. T. Chew and Edwin Lee (eds.), *A History of Singapore* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp.36-40; C. M. Turnbull, *A History of Singapore 1819-1988* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp.33-124. For a rare feminist perspective on colonial Singapore, see Susan Morgan, *Place Matters: Gendered Geography in Victorian Women's Travel Books About Southeast Asia* (New Brunswick, N. J.: Rutgers University Press, 1996), pp.31-48. For nineteenth-century images of the Straits Settlements featured in *The Illustrated London News*, see D. J. M. Tate, *Straits Affairs: The Malay World and Singapore* (Hong Kong: John Nicolson, 1989), pp.3-55, pp.103-26.



1.2.5 World Travel Route from *Cook's Tours Round the World*, c.1890.

The relative ease of travel after the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 transformed Singapore's strategic mid-way position into a natural transit point for ships plying between England and the Far East.¹⁰ As feminist literary historian Susan Morgan points out, the port city of Singapore 'was so commonplace in European accounts in the second half of the nineteenth century and in the early decades of the twentieth century that to take up the range of specific representations of Singapore would require its own book-length study'.¹¹ Novelist Joseph Conrad who traveled this route himself as a sailor in the

¹⁰ Originally, the journey time between London and Singapore took an average 120 days via the Cape of Good Hope but this was reduced when a rail passage, the Overland Route, was established in 1840 on a narrow thread of land separating the Mediterranean and Red seas. Passengers, goods and mail passed through the Mediterranean, disembarked in Alexandria, and took the train to Port Said where they continued their journey by sea. See for example, Lynne Withey, *Grand Tours and Cook's Tours: A History of Leisure Travel, 1750 to 1915* (London: Aurum Press, 1998), pp.263-93; G. E. Mitton, *The Peninsular and Oriental* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1913), pp.10-32, pp.65-88; Andrew Williamson, *The Golden Age of Travel: The Romantic Years of Tourism from the Thomas Cook Archives* (Peterborough, UK: Thomas Cook Publishing, 1998), p.63, pp.86-9.

¹¹ Morgan, *Place Matters*, p.33. Examples of mid-nineteenth-century and early-twentieth-century Western travellers' impressions of colonial Singapore are found in collected anthologies such as Michael Wise and Mun Him Wise (eds.), *Travellers' Tales of Old Singapore* (Singapore: Times Books International, 1985) covers period between 1850-1945; John Bastin (ed.), *Travellers' Singapore: An Anthology* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford

late nineteenth century described the opening of the Suez Canal as a catalyst for leisure travel: '... like the breaking of a dam, (it) had let in upon the East a flood of new ships, new men, new methods of trade. It changed the face of the Eastern seas and the spirit of their life'.¹²

Steamship companies like the Peninsular and Oriental, Straits Steamship, Messageries Maritimes and Lloyd Triestino catered to an affluent European middle class boosted by the industrial revolution and in particular, British subjects whose empire then stretched from Egypt to India, Southeast Asia and Australia. Even if the passage through the Suez Canal shortened the journey, a round-the-world trip was still a momentous affair, 'a circuit of 23,000 to 23,500 miles in 28 to 80 days exclusively on mail steamers and trains' which necessitated a grand upheaval of 'their entire stock of clothing', advice probably only to be heeded if the passenger traveled first-class and was allowed 336lb in baggage.¹³ (Fig.1.2.6)

Thus, it was into this ephemeral and often romanticized context of long distance leisure travel that the Sarkies' new hotel – auspiciously named 'Raffles Hotel' after Singapore's erstwhile founder Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles – inserted itself, proudly opening for business on the first day of the last month in 1887 from its first modest premises, an

University Press, 1994), covers period between 1819-1942; Charles Allen (ed.), *Tales from the South China Seas: Images of the British in Southeast Asian in the Twentieth Century* (London: British Broadcasting System, 1983), covers period between 1920-1930 and presents the expatriate's view of Malaya and Singapore. For a critique of representations of Singapore in colonial guidebooks and travelogues, see Han Mui-Ling, 'From Travelogues to Guidebooks: Imagining Colonial Singapore, 1819-1940', in *Sejour* (Oct 2003), v.18, n.2, pp.257-78.

¹² Joseph Conrad, 'The End of the Tether', in *Youth/ Heart of Darkness/ The End of the Tether* (London: Penguin Books, 1995), pp.149-299; here p.154, also cited by Liu, *Raffles Hotel* (1999), p.21.

¹³ From George Bradshaw, *Bradshaw's Through Routes, Overland Guide and Handbook to India, Egypt, Turkey, China Australia and New Zealand* (London: Bradshaw Guide Office, 1903), cited by Liu, *Raffles Hotel* (1999), p.22.

‘unexceptional’ ten-room seaside bungalow at the corner of Beach Road and Bras Basah Road.¹⁴ The bungalow, a double storey mansion, was built in a style common to Anglo-Indian architecture. It was characterized by its mixture of vernacular architectural elements such as generous verandahs along the outer sides of the building, steep tiled pitched roofs edged with intricate timber fascia latticework, timber louvered windows and low railings, mixed with a neo-classical vocabulary distinguished by symmetry and details like masonry colonnades, arched openings and a portico at the front.¹⁵ (Fig.1.2.7) It occupied a large well-planted compound near the beach and had a magnificent view of the sea. The historical origins of this house or ‘Beach House’, as it was known before it was taken over by the Sarkies remains at best, speculative. There are two versions of its tentative history. While an earlier hotel monograph by Ilsa Sharp claims that Beach House was originally a mansion owned by the British Dare family who ran a popular Tiffin Room on the same premises,¹⁶ the hotel’s recent museum curator and monograph author Gretchen Liu suggests that Beach House was probably built in the 1830s for a well-known Penang resident, Robert Scott, a descendent of Sir Walter Scott.

According to Liu, the house changed ownership a few times until it was acquired by the Arab merchant and landowner Mohamed Alsagoff in 1870. Alsagoff subsequently leased it out to a veterinarian Dr Charles Emmerson, owner of the Emmerson’s Hotel, which in

¹⁴ The house was leased by the Sarkies from a wealthy Arab merchant and landowner Syed Mohammed Alsagoff, whose ‘name and signature appears on all the hotel’s original building plans’. See Liu, *Raffles Hotel* (2006), pp.15-16.

¹⁵ For architectural discourse on the ‘bungalow’ and the ‘verandah’, see Anthony D. King, *The Bungalow: The Production of a Global Culture* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984). For a literary interpretation of the verandah, see Bill Ashcroft, *Post-colonial Transformation* (London: Routledge, 2001), pp.193-6. For a colonial impression of the bungalow, see John Cameron, *Our Tropical Possessions in Malayan India* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1865), p.75.

¹⁶ See Sharp, *There is Only One Raffles*, pp.20-1.

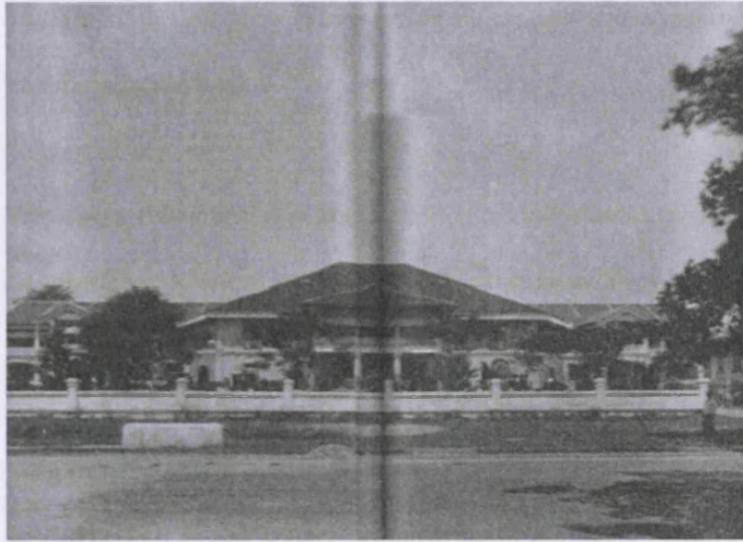
1878, stood on the same site as the present hotel. The property was thereafter leased to the Raffles Institution, which used it as a boarding house for boys, before it was taken up by the Sarkies.¹⁷ Beach House was located at the fringe of the colonial city, and was five minutes' walk from the 'Padang', a commons belonging to the Church of England where cricket was played and where a bronze statue of Stamford Raffles was erected in 1887. It was also close to the Esplanade, a beachside promenade favoured by expatriate families and courting couples alike.¹⁸ Nearby were two of Raffles Hotel's rival hotels – the de L'Europe and Adelphi Hotels, which faced the 'Padang'. (Fig.1.2.8 and Fig.1.2.2)



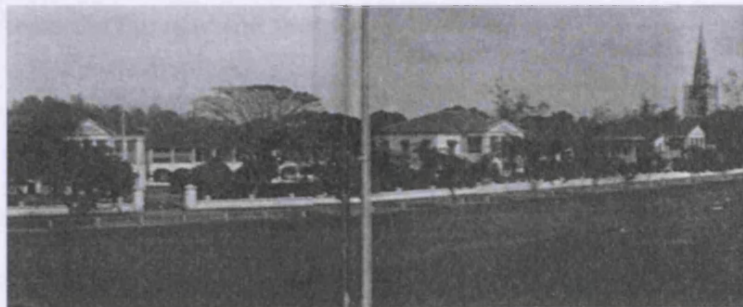
1.2.6 'For the Shore'.

¹⁷ Liu, *Raffles Hotel* (2006), p.17, p.32

¹⁸ For annotated images of the colonial district by mid-nineteenth-century surveyor John Turnbull Thomson, see John Hall-Jones and Christopher Hooi, *An Early Surveyor in Singapore: John Turnbull Thomson In Singapore, 1841-1853* (Singapore: Singapore National Museum, 1983). See for example, images of the 'Padang' (pp.64-5) and the Raffles Institution, which was on Beach Road, near to the Raffles Hotel (pp.78-9). For anecdotes on colonial life and society, see Donald and Joanna Moore, *The First 150 Years of Singapore* (Singapore: Donald Moore Press Ltd., 1969), pp.198-213, pp.330-42.



1.2.7 Raffles Hotel in 1890 prior to renovations, photograph by G. R. Lambert and Sons.



1.2.8 The Hotel de L'Europe facing the *Padang*, 1880s.

As diasporic Armenians who had emigrated from New Julfa in Persia, the ‘indefatigable and enterprising Messrs Sarkies’¹⁹ were ambitious and keen to prove themselves as gracious hosts who could provide first-class accommodation, which could rival the best hotels in the West.²⁰ Tigran Sarkies, an intrepid traveler himself, worked tirelessly over the following two decades to update the hotel with better-equipped bedrooms, modern amenities like electric lights and ceiling fans, ‘the best dining room in Asia’²¹ and a

¹⁹ From *The Straits Times*, 14 August 1889, cited by Wright, *Respected Citizens*, p.115.

²⁰ For a history of the Sarkies of the Raffles Hotel, see Wright, *Respected Citizens*, pp.114-32, pp.274-80.

²¹ From *The Straits Times*, 21 March 1900, cited by Wright, *Respected Citizens*, p.117.

billiard room that proved so popular that it was subsequently enlarged, and praised as 'the finest in the East'.²²

The enterprising hoteliers kept in touch with the latest trends in the business, especially the emerging Western notion of the 'Grand Hotel',²³ a late nineteenth-century concept that emphasized the importance of 'fine accommodation, excellent food and impeccable service',²⁴ which were standards unheard of in non-Western hotels of that period. Some of the hotels which were established around the same time as the Raffles Hotel in the 1880s, included New York's Waldorf Astoria Hotel, London's Savoy and Ritz Hotels.²⁵ The innovative Tigran Sarkies secured the Thomas Cook franchise to conduct on-shore tours for the new and prosperous breed of round-the-world travelers in 1907. His first clients were a small group of American women.²⁶ The hotel had come of age in the first decade of the twentieth century when it was mentioned in a popular early-twentieth-century British handbook for Singapore-bound Britons as 'one of the architectural

²² From *The Straits Times*, 6 October 1906, cited by Wright, *Respected Citizens*, p.119.

²³ See Elaine Denby, *Grand Hotels Reality & Illusion: An Architectural and Social History* (London: Reaktion Press, 1998); David Watkin, *Grand Hotel: The Golden Age of Palace Hotels: An Architectural and Social History* (London: Dent, 1984). The 'Grand Hotel' concept became popular in Southeast Asia at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Examples of 'grand hotels' still in operation include the two other hotels previously owned by the Sarkies – The Strand Hotel in Yangon and the Eastern and Oriental in Penang, Malaysia, Hanoi's Métropole Hotel, Ho Chi Minh City's Hotel Majestic, and Bangkok's Oriental Hotel.

²⁴ Liu, *Raffles Hotel* (2006), p.19.

²⁵ See Marcus Binney, *The Ritz London* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1999); Henry B. Lent, *The Waldorf-Astoria: A Brief Chronicle of a Unique Institution Now Entering Its Fifth Decade* (New York: Hotel Waldorf-Astoria Corporation, 1934); Edward Hungerford, *The Story of the Waldorf-Astoria* (New York: Knickerbocker Press, 1925).

²⁶ Wright, *Respected Citizens*, p.120.

ornaments in Singapore' that stood on par with 'the front rank of similar establishments East or West of Suez'.²⁷

With the aim to become a 'Grand Hotel', the Raffles Hotel was constantly under construction in the first decade and a half of its opening. Five major buildings were put up between 1889 and 1913. (Figs.1.2.9-1.2.10) In 1889, two symmetrical double-storey wings in neo-Classical style accommodating twenty-two new suites – each with its own private verandah separated from the public verandah by a low timber balustrade – were added to the old bungalow.²⁸ A year later in 1890, Tigran Sarkies built a new Billiard Room, 'which was then as necessary to a hotel worthy of its name as a swimming pool or a health club is today'.²⁹ (Fig.1.2.11) The Billiard Room, a timber structure of arched openings with no walls and entirely raised on brick pillars, was located in a separate block at the corner of Bras Basah and Beach Roads so that it would 'not interfere with the domestic arrangements of ladies and families residing at the hotel'.³⁰ The hotel proudly advertised its four imported English billiard tables.³¹ The Billiard Room was also where a series of animals unexpectedly took refuge between 1902 and 1904. The most illustrious of these creatures was a circus tiger, which was unceremoniously shot in the undercroft space of this raised structure in 1902.

In 1894, the opening of the Palm Court Wing – an L-shaped double-story extension that bordered the hotel's renowned and photogenic Palm Court garden – added another

²⁷ Arnold Wright and H. A. Cartwright, *Twentieth-Century Impressions of British Malaya: Its History, People, Commerce, Industries and Resources*, (London: Lloyd's Greater Britain Publishing Company, 1908), p.942, cited by Wright, *Respected Citizens*, p.120.

²⁸ Liu, *Raffles Hotel* (2006), p.18.

²⁹ Liu, *Raffles Hotel* (2006), p.19.

³⁰ Liu, *Raffles Hotel* (2006), p.19.

³¹ 'A New Hotel in Singapore', in *The Straits Times*, 19 September 1887.

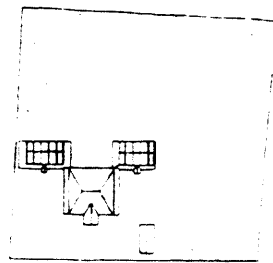
thirty suites, each with their private sitting room overlooking a public verandah and a quiet garden planted with palm trees. By 1897, after the owners announced plans to embark on its most major renovation exercise under the auspices of Swan and MacLaren Singapore's first private architectural firm, the local newspaper hailed it as 'one of the largest and handsomest hotels in the East'.³² This major building phase was completed in 1899. This phase saw the construction of a new three-storey, neo-Renaissance style Main Building with a glazed central atrium erected in the place of the old bungalow, which was demolished to make way for this new building.³³ On the ground floor, there was the largest dining room in Asia,³⁴ a T-shaped structure capable of seating five hundred persons, while the two upper floors accommodated fifteen spacious suites, a large reading room and two drawing rooms with sea views. (Fig.1.2.12) The entire building was surrounded by a richly decorated verandah. This design was overseen by a partner at Swan and MacLaren's, one Regent Alfred Bidwell, a previous graduate from London's Architectural Association who had experience designing buildings for the tropical climate when he was employed by the Public Works Department in Kuala Lumpur.³⁵

³² From *The Straits Times*, 1 October 1897, cited by Wright, *Respected Citizens*, p.116.

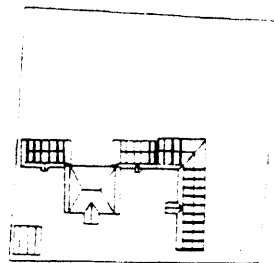
³³ See Wright, *Respected Citizens*, p.116; Liu, *Raffles Hotel* (2006), pp.44-45.

³⁴ 'Raffles Hotel: Important Additions and Improvements', in *The Straits Times*, 1 July 1897.

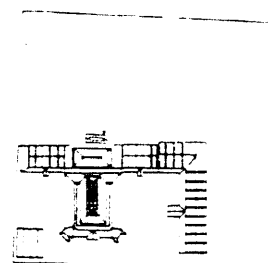
³⁵ R. A. J. Bidwell was from Wimbledon, South London. He worked with Lockyer, Son and Cox of London, Crickmay and Son, was chief assistant to W. H. Woodroffe and assistant to superintending architect at the London County Council. After leaving the Public Works Department of Kuala Lumpur in 1895, he joined Swan and MacLaren in Singapore, where he was offered partnership four years later. Information from Bidwell's biographical profile was obtained from a file on Bidwell held by London's Royal Institute of British Architects' (RIBA) library. This file contains scarcely any information on Bidwell as the RIBA appears not to have any records on him. Most of the file consists of correspondence between Singapore historian Jon S. H. Lim and James Bettley, who was the RIBA's research assistant during 1985, the year in which the letters were exchanged. See also Wright and Cartwright, *Twentieth-Century Impressions*, p.627; Liu, *Raffles Hotel* (2006), p.44.



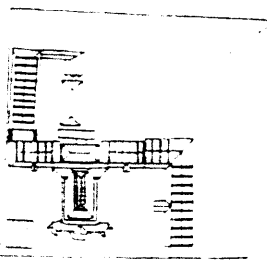
1889
Henry Richards, Architect



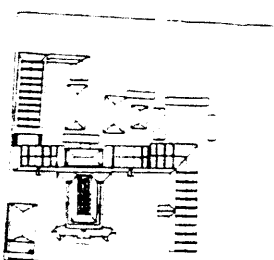
1893
Swan & Maclaren, Architects



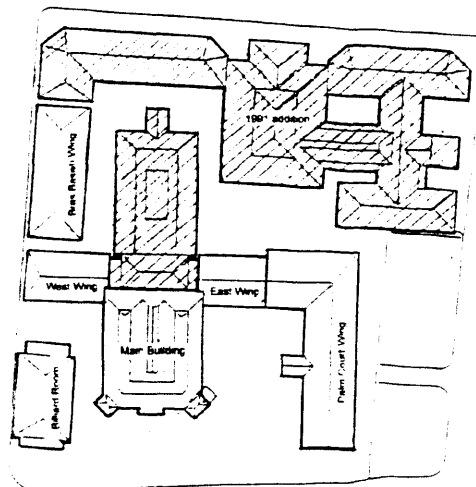
1897
R.A.J. Biowell for Swan &
Maclaren, Architects



1902
Swan & Maclaren, Architects

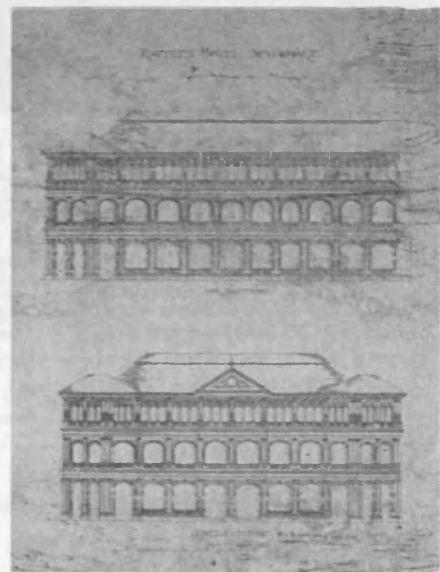
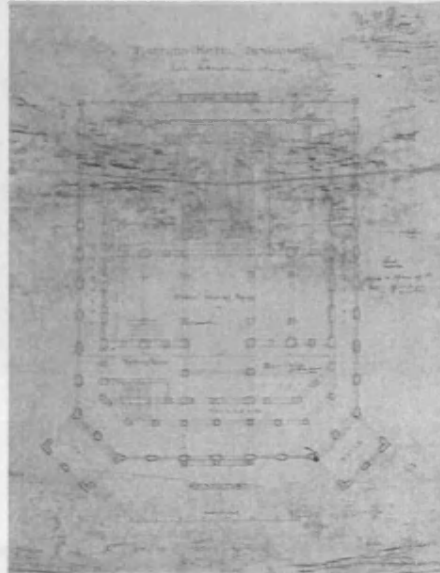


1905
Tomlinson & Lemit, Architects

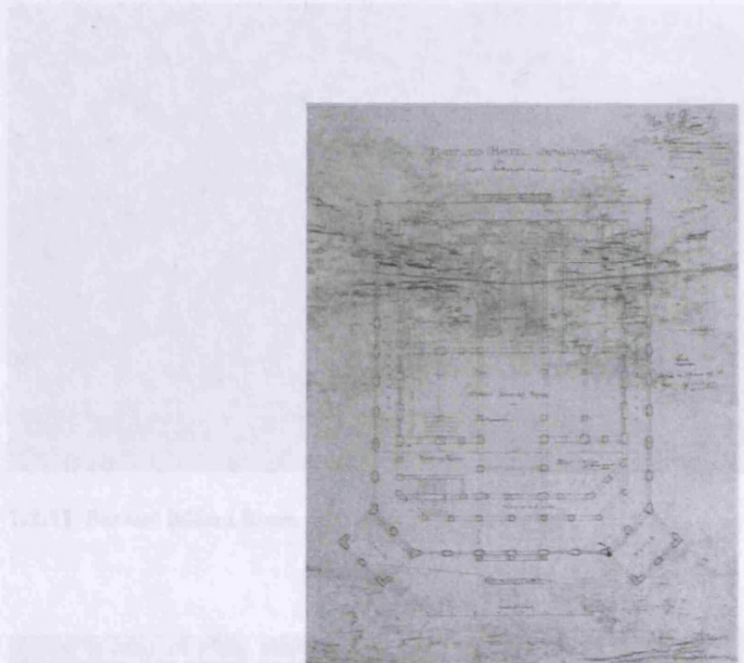


1991
Architects 61, Architects

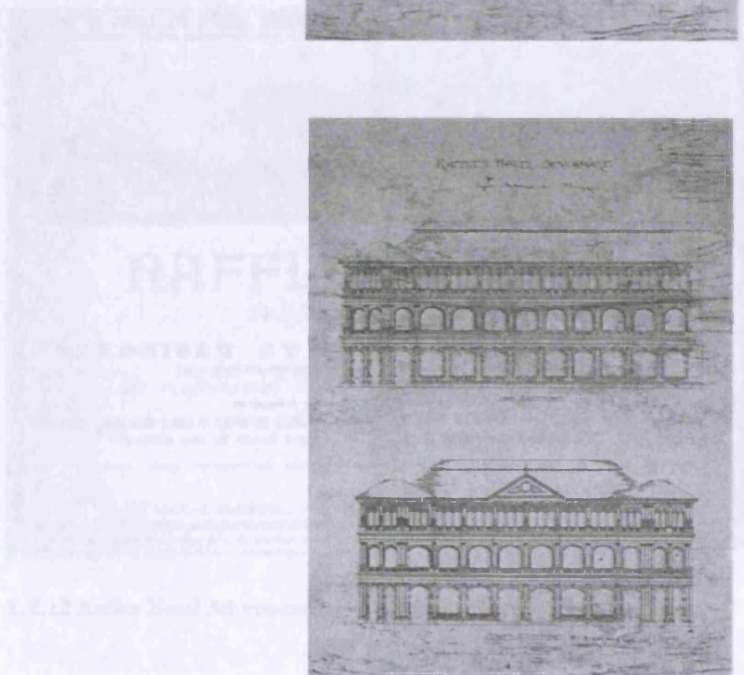
1.2.9 Additions and Alterations at the Raffles Hotel (1889-1905).



1.2.10 Plan and Elevations of the Main Building by Bidwell (1897).



1.2.11 Raffles Hotel Plan



1.2.12 Raffles Hotel Elevations

When plans were announced for the new, a spot south of the city, early among them was the Raffles Hotel. In 1897, the building had a new wing, the Raffles Hotel, which had the hotel as

1.2.10 Plan and Elevations of the Main Building by Bidwell (1897).

and the Raffles Hotel, which had the hotel as

From the Raffles Hotel, 18 April 1897, and the Raffles Hotel, 18 April 1897.



1.2.11 'Bar and Billiard Room prior to its 1907 renovation'.



1.2.12 Raffles Hotel Advertisement (c.1902) showing 1897 renovations.

When plans were announced concerning the major addition of the new triple storey Bras Basah Wing in 1904, the leading local newspaper, *The Straits Times*, hailed the hotel as 'the most magnificent establishment of its kind east of Suez'.³⁶ This last addition innovated the mixed-use concept by putting shops on the ground level, 'cleverly designed

³⁶ From *The Straits Times*, 8 April 1904, cited by Wright, *Respected Citizens*, p.118.

with windows on both sides so as to attract custom from the street as well as within the hotel³⁷ and an additional twenty-two suites on the upper floors, which were accessible only through the hotel's main entrance. To cope with popular demand, a larger masonry Billiard Room holding six tables was built in place of the old timber one in 1907.³⁸ The hotel's last significant addition was a cast iron portico at the Main Building in 1913.

The hotel's fine quality was widely promoted through advertisements in local newspapers, which promised it to be 'the select rendezvous of the elite of Singapore ... for First Class travelers only',³⁹ or boasting that the hotel would 'set the pace and have our imitators',⁴⁰ claiming to be 'The only Hotel of its Unique Style in the East'.⁴¹ The hotel often included compliments received from guests as part of its advertisement, for instance, calling itself 'The Savoy of Singapore'⁴² after the hotel was favourably compared to the London hotel, or in another case, reprinting a testimony from *The Manila Times* that suggested, 'Nothing advertises a city so well as a first-class hotel. Say "Raffles" to any tourist and he at once thinks of Singapore. The two are synonymous'.⁴³

The hotel was rewarded by distinguished patrons, who included dignitaries, aristocratic families, royalty, celebrities and especially, writers, with whom the hotel has built a strong

³⁷ Wright, *Respected Citizens*, p.118.

³⁸ 'Raffles Hotel: New Billiard Room to be Constructed', in *The Straits Times*, 9 October 1906. The new Billiard Room was designed by architects Tomlinson and Lermitt.

³⁹ From *The Straits Times*, 30 June 1904, cited by Wright, *Respected Citizens*, p.118.

⁴⁰ From advertisement of 1905. Liu, *Raffles Hotel* (2006), p.45.

⁴¹ From advertisement of 1909. Liu, *Raffles Hotel* (2006), p.45.

⁴² Comment originally made in a London magazine *The Sphere*, 18 March 1905, cited by Liu, *Raffles Hotel* (2006), p.46.

⁴³ From *The Straits Times*, 20 February 1907. The comment was originally made by *The Manila Times*, 2 February 1907, cited by Wright, *Respected Citizens*, Figure No.35, unpaginated.

alliance.⁴⁴ For example, in his novel, *The End of the Tether* set in 1880s Singapore, Joseph Conrad (who as a sailor, could not afford to stay at the Raffles Hotel)⁴⁵ mentions it as a 'straggling building of bricks, as airy as a birdcage', while Rudyard Kipling who made a brief stopover in Singapore in 1889 recommended that the traveler, 'Feed at the Raffles ... where the food is as excellent as the rooms are bad'.⁴⁶ Although these comments were not necessarily flattering to the establishment, Tigran Sarkies recognized early on that the influence of well-known guests like Kipling would benefit the hotel, and Sarkies duly turned the criticism to his advantage by omitting the second part of Kipling's comment and using the writer's praise for the food as part of the hotel's advertising arsenal.⁴⁷ (Fig.1.2.13) In the intervening years, the hotel played host to many playwrights, poets and writers namely Noel Coward, James A. Michener, Graham Greene, Han Suyin, Frank Buck, Pablo Neruda and Andre Malraux. However, of all its literary connections, the hotel is most renowned for its link to English writer W. Somerset Maugham. Maugham visited the hotel in 1921, and returned twice in 1925 and 1959. When he was staying at the hotel, he liked to write in the Palm Court, and it was from him that the still oft-quoted line 'Raffles, for all the fables of the exotic East' was drawn.⁴⁸

The historical period between 1887 and the mid 1920s was significant for the establishment. It witnessed the hotel's soaring popularity, reaching a peak of visitor numbers in the 1920s, making it sought-after accommodation. The 1920s also saw the

⁴⁴ See Liu, *Raffles Hotel* (2006), p.46.

⁴⁵ On Conrad's background as a British merchant seaman in Eastern waters, see Norman Sherry, *Conrad's Eastern World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), pp.1-15. Flower differs from Sherry's opinion that Conrad did not stay at the Raffles Hotel, see Flower, *Year of the Tiger*, p.6.

⁴⁶ Liu, *Raffles Hotel* (2006), p.21.

⁴⁷ Flower, *Year of the Tiger*, p.6.

⁴⁸ Flower, *Year of the Tiger*, p.23; Liu, *Raffles Hotel* (2006), p.91; Liu, *Raffles Hotel* (1999), p.143; Pregarz, *Memories of Raffles*, p.52, Sharp, *There is Only One Raffles*, p.83.

modernization and expansion of the most important spaces in the hotel, namely the Main Building, the Palm Court wing and the Billiard Room. Although renovations were made after the 1920s, such as the addition of the Ball Room in the 1930s, these building works were not considered key architectural additions, and in some cases, were deemed as insensitive additions, which marred the aesthetic quality of Bidwell's neo-Renaissance Main Building.⁴⁹

With the slump in the Malayan Rubber trade and local tin industries in the late 1920s to the early 1930s, followed by World War Two, which affected Southeast Asia between 1942 and 1945, the hotel's profile diminished. In the intervening years, the edifice began to age and lost much of its lustre.⁵⁰ It was not until the building was declared a National Monument by the Singapore government in 1987 that efforts to restore its architecture were gradually put in place. A special Architectural Design Panel convened and agreed that the benchmark year for restoration work would be 1915 – a year that witnessed the hotel's most significant architectural and social developments, which shaped enduring perceptions of this hotel that still hold firm today.⁵¹ (Fig.1.2.14) A budget of S\$160 million was allocated to cover the cost of restoration work to the Main Building, the Palm Court and the Bras Basah Wings and their associated gardens, and the Billiard Room. The hotel was refitted with the latest building services and a new extension at the rear of the site, which comprises shops, restaurants, a Victorian-style playhouse, and the hotel's

⁴⁹ This opinion was taken by the Preservation of Monuments Board and the Urban Redevelopment Authority, which set the benchmark date of 1915 for the restoration of this National Monument.

⁵⁰ See Liu, *Raffles Hotel* (2006), p.136.

⁵¹ Liu, *Raffles Hotel* (2006), pp.136–7.

in-house museum, was constructed.⁵² The hotel closed in March 1989 and reopened for business two years later on 16 September 1991.



1.2.13 'Feed at the Raffles', according to Rudyard Kipling.



1.2.14 'By 1915 all of the hotel's historic buildings were in place'.

⁵² Setyadi Ongkowidjaja, 'Raffles Hotel: The Restoration Approach', in *Singapore Institute of Architects Journal*, (May/June 1992), n.172, p.44 (followed by 5 unpaginated pages).

The National Monument and the Architectural Encounter

Upon designating it as a National Monument in 1987, the Preservation of Monuments Board has concentrated on rehabilitating the hotel's colonial architectural style and lineage.⁵³ The conservation committee stipulated that restoration work should adhere strictly to the late-nineteenth-century neo-Renaissance architectural style and details of Bidwell's design, which included a combination of divergent classical Italianate forms, such as the columns adorned with Doric, Ionic and Corinthian orders and Palladian-styled facades, mixed with Anglo-Indian features, like verandahs and steep tiled pitch roofs.⁵⁴ A similar requirement was also applicable to the hotel's new-built complex.⁵⁵

Extant architectural representations of the Raffles Hotel – presently, these are sporadic and appear in various sources such as the hotel's privately commissioned histories, general architectural compendiums on Singapore buildings, heritage publications, conservation guidelines and magazine articles⁵⁶ – depict it narrowly in relation to its architectural form and style, and in reference to its architect. These architectural representations, which I will refer to herewith as the hotel's 'emergent architectural

⁵³ Liu, *In Granite and Chunam*, pp.231-2.

⁵⁴ Liu, *In Granite and Chunam*, pp.235-6.

⁵⁵ Ongkowidjaja, 'Raffles Hotel'.

⁵⁶ From official heritage sources and reports, see *Raffles Hotel Preservation Guidelines*, pp.18-21, p.48; *Objectives, Principles and Standards for Preservation and Conservation*, pp.12-17; Liu, *In Granite and Chunam*, pp.231-2; Gretchen, *Pastel Portraits*, pp.138-40; Powell, *Living Legacy*, pp.176-83. From general architectural compendiums on Singapore architecture, see Jane Beamish and Jane Ferguson, *A History of Singapore Architecture: The Making of a City* (Singapore: Graham Brash, 1985), pp.80-2; Norman Edwards and Peter Keys, *Singapore: A Guide to Buildings, Streets and Places* (Singapore: Times Books International, 1988), pp.279-80. From the hotel's commissioned histories, see Sharp, *There is Only One Raffles*, p.31, p.34; Flower, *Year of the Tiger*, p.73; Liu, *Raffles Hotel* (2006), pp.19-20, p.44, pp.56-7, p.183, p.194. From architectural magazines, see Ongkowidjaja, 'Raffles Hotel'; Richard K. F. Ho, 'The Raffles Hotel, Singapore', in *MIMAR*, (January/March 1984), n.11, pp.40-3. See also Wright, *Respected Citizens*, p.115.

history/histories', focus on its eclectic architectural style, which has also been described as 'tropical' and 'colonial', and keenly catalogue the building's mixture of vernacular and colonial architectural elements, for example, the Palladian-styled Main Building with central pediment, moulded columns and pilasters, complemented by tropical features like its pitched clay-tiled roofs with deep overhangs, decorative verandahs, landscaped courtyards and a regular rhythm of solid forms and voids. These sources have also unanimously bestowed accolades on Bidwell, who maintains a heroic profile in the hotel's emergent architectural history. Thus, it is unsurprising that Bidwell's architectural drawings have been reclaimed as an important part of the nation's history and are now securely kept by the National Archives.

At the National Archives, the holdings pertaining to the architectural records of the Raffles Hotel exist primarily as architectural plans, sections and elevations dating from the late-nineteenth century, as well as images produced in postcards and photographs. The architectural drawings include as-built and un-built proposals. Although the architectural archive is publicly accessible and some of the drawings and photographs may be viewed through the archives' official website,⁵⁷ firsthand contact with this material is generally limited. For example, when I visited the National Archives in Spring 2004 to examine the original architectural drawings, I was informed by archive staff that these drawings were being restored, and were unavailable for public viewing for an indefinite period of time. As a compromise, I was shown duplicate drawings captured on microfiche, which were not always of good quality. I bring up this experience to highlight the heritage body's careful policing of the hotel's architectural archive, and

⁵⁷ See <http://www.a2o.com.sg> (Accessed on 7 May 2006).

contrast this control against the freely available anecdotal historical evidence exhibited in the hotel's in-house museum.

The hotel's in-house museum consists of a fragmented⁵⁸ collection of travel paraphernalia, old maps, postcards, a few letters, guidebooks, books, photographs, newspaper clippings, luggage labels, suitcases, sketches and cartoons, which are loosely connected to the hotel's colonial past and its 'Golden Age of Travel', a period that spans 'roughly between 1880 to 1939'.⁵⁹ These documents and objects are exhibited in large glass wooden cabinets or kept in drawers. The museum opened in 1991 to show material collected during the hotel's own 1989 Heritage Search led by Liu.⁶⁰ The museum is open to the public, free of charge, seven days a week.

In this museum, I am drawn to two popular associations that still circulate as a significant part of the hotel's history. One emphasizes the hotel's literary link, especially to Maugham and his habit of writing in the Palm Court, an association, which was boosted by naming suite no.102 – a room overlooking the Palm Court that Maugham used to occupy – after the author. The other concerns several newspaper clippings, which recollect how four animals invaded the hotel's Billiard Room in the first decade of the twentieth century. Like Maugham's connection to the Palm Court, the animals' link to the Billiard Room has become synonymous⁶¹ with the hotel's history, and especially with

⁵⁸ Historian Maurizio Peleggi has also expressed that the hotel's museum collection is 'fragmented'. See Maurizio Peleggi, 'Consuming Colonial Nostalgia: The Monumentalization of Historical Hotels in Urban South-East Asia', in *Asia Pacific Viewpoint*, (December 2005), v.46, n.3, pp.255-65.

⁵⁹ *The Raffles Museum Leaflet*, undated and unpaginated.

⁶⁰ The findings of this committee were documented in the hotel's 1992 monograph, which was published to coincide with the re-opening of the newly refurbished National Monument.

⁶¹ Liu calls them 'animal legends'. See Liu, *Raffles Hotel* (2006), pp.66-7. These animal accounts are synonymous with the hotel's history, and are also mentioned by Flower, Sharp and Pregarz. See Pregarz,

its colonial image. These two popular associations – Maugham and the animals – constituted key elements in my own investigation of this hotel through my architectural encounter, which will be elaborated in the chapters that follow. However, it becomes clear that my own method of inquiry veers sharply away from the emergent architectural history of the Raffles Hotel as National Monument, which as I have discussed, emphasizes an architect-centred discourse revolving around formal and stylistic design components, and draws connections between regional or vernacular architectural forms and national identity.

Although I do not doubt that this kind of architect-centred representation is necessary, it becomes problematic when it is perceived as the primary mode of architectural engagement. From a close reading of these emergent architectural histories, I also find it worrying that the hotel's colonial architectural elements are unproblematically translated into an architectural rhetoric, which seeks to inflect ideological national aspirations through the monumentalization of this colonial building. In framing this colonial hotel as a monument related to national identity, two problems arise.

First, as feminist cultural historian Anne McClintock argues, 'all nationalisms are gendered',⁶² and as McClintock further asserts, following Cynthia Enloe, nationalisms have 'typically sprung from masculinized memory, masculinized humiliation and

'Tigers in the Tiffin Room', in *Memories of Raffles*, pp.42-7; Flower, *Year of the Tiger*, pp.20-1; Sharp, *There is Only One Raffles*, pp.35-7; Flower, *The Story of Singapore*, p.71.

⁶² Anne McClintock, "'No Longer in a Future Heaven": Gender, Race and Nationalism', in Anne McClintock, Aamir Mufti and Ella Shohat (eds.), *Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation and Postcolonial Perspectives* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), pp.89-112; here p.89.

masculinized hope'.⁶³ Thus, although 'the gendering of the national imaginary has been conspicuously paltry',⁶⁴ it may be argued here that the seemingly gender-neutral architectural 'identity' linked to this national monument is insidiously a paternal one. This masculinized position is augmented further by the heritage board's uncritical position towards the hotel's colonial history, whereby the place of the masculine colonizer is henceforth taken up by the newly empowered ex-colonized, who as Terrence Eagleton suggests, is innocuously presented as 'a unitary subject known as the people'⁶⁵ but in fact, such 'privileged national agents are urban, male, vanguardist, and violent'.⁶⁶

Second, as historian Maurizio Peleggi has argued, the monumentalization of colonial-era hotels problematically reify the historical past through 'exaltation of its signs'⁶⁷ but deny its historical complexities. Peleggi points out that this reification occurs in two ways. On the one hand, through what he calls 'architectural enhancement', that is, a restoration of architectural styles, forms and interiors that 'achieve the semblance of historical authenticity', and on the other hand, through 'discursive authentication' whereby fragmentary documentary evidence is used to forge 'foundational myths' about the hotel's past, and 'to claim monumental status'.⁶⁸ Peleggi criticizes both modes of monumentalization – the first, paradoxically inflecting a contested national identity

⁶³ Cynthia Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches, and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), p.44, cited by McClintock, "No Longer in a Future Heaven", p.89.

⁶⁴ McClintock, "No Longer in a Future Heaven", p.89.

⁶⁵ Terrence Eagleton, 'Nationalism, Irony, and Commitment', in Terrence Eagleton, Frederic Jameson and Edward Said (eds.), *Nationalism, Colonialism, and Literature* (Minneapolis: Minnesota Press, 1990), p.28, cited by McClintock, "No Longer in a Future Heaven", p.96.

⁶⁶ McClintock, "No Longer in a Future Heaven", p.96.

⁶⁷ Peleggi, 'Consuming Colonial Nostalgia', p.262.

⁶⁸ Peleggi, 'Consuming Colonial Nostalgia', p.255, p.261.

through its colonizer's architectural styles and forms, and the second, uncritically installing fragmentary myths as foundational histories.

Peleggi highlights the problems of uncritically adopting the 'signs of history' as history itself, and the legitimization of historical value through 'architectural enhancement'.⁶⁹ His critique is valuable in that it examines the structures of monumentalization for the forms of knowledge and meanings they inherently construct. Taking Peleggi's cue, it is worthwhile revisiting the hotel's two modalities, that is, on the one hand as a National Monument, and on the other hand an architecture with a speculative and embellished past premised on anecdotal evidence, by examining the structure of its two archives – the official architectural archives of drawings, building styles, forms and interiors stored in the National Archives, and the ad-hoc collection of fragmentary objects and texts in the hotel's museum.

Although both archives may address the same architectural object, I argue that they lead towards different architectural approaches to knowing. The official architectural archives, jointly controlled by the National Archive of Singapore (NAS) and the Preservation of Monuments Board (PMB), polices and reifies the architect's drawings as fundamental to architectural knowledge. Both NAS and PMB are governmental bodies managed by the Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts (MICA).⁷⁰ The mission statements of NAS, PMB and MICA emphasize the fostering of 'nationhood',

⁶⁹ Peleggi, 'Consuming Colonial Nostalgia', pp.263-4.

⁷⁰ The National Archives, National Museum and the Oral History Department of Singapore the then Ministry of Information and the Arts (MICA was previously called 'MITA') were brought together in 1993 to form the National Heritage Board (NHB). The Preservations of Monuments Board was previously under the Ministry of National Development but was transferred to MICA in 1997.

‘rootedness to country’ and ‘national identity’.⁷¹ As such, this archive frames the colonial monument through categories of national heritage, national identity and social cohesion. In comparison, the bric-a-brac gathered in the museum, although arranged according to museological conventions with intentions of presenting a seamless history, is nonetheless perceivably full of gaps in knowledge, and more open to interpretation. This experiencing subject’s encounter with the museum exhibits suggests a different view of the hotel’s architectural formation. If the official archives present the hotel as a rarefied and autonomous architectural object, the open-ended museum exhibits engage her curiosity through their suggestion that its architecture is constituted through an accumulation of contexts, occupants, practices and desires, outside those of the architect’s, and of national identity.

As previously mentioned, it is problematic that the hotel is perceived through two seemingly unrelated modalities – an emergent architectural history given over to ‘Architecture’ in the custody of a proper archive, and an architectural web of anecdotal connections lying *outside* ‘Architecture’ in a museum apparently reserved for more frivolous evidence. The museum exhibits, although contrived, are more immediate to the experiencing subject and closely related to popular perceptions of the hotel but these anecdotal evidences do not normally contribute to the hotel’s ‘architectural’ account. Any attempt to understand how these two registers – the official architectural archive and the museum’s anecdotal evidence – could come together necessitates a rethinking of

⁷¹ For NAS, see: <http://www.nhb.gov.sg/MCC/aboutnhb/CvisionMission>;

for PMB, see: <http://www.mica.gov.sg/aboutus/pmb.html>;

for MICA, see: http://www.mica.gov.sg/aboutus/abtus_logo.html (Accessed on 7 May 2006).

For objectives of conservation, see *Objectives, Principles and Standards for Preservation and Conservation*.

conventional architectural historiographical methods, which currently privilege an 'architectural history' mediated by architect-centred notions of 'Architecture'.

Thus, this thesis advocates the criticality of supplementary accounts where architecture may be reflected through the experiencing subject's encounter with the architectural object, through subject positions outside those of the architect's. The architectural account that emerges from this new approach, I suggest, is less a normative 'architectural history' than a discursive web embedding different spaces (the architect's, the occupant's and the experiencing subject's, for example) and times (the building's, the occupant's and the experiencing subject's, for example).

In taking a gendered approach towards interpreting this 'archive', the thesis is also interested in reclaiming anecdotal evidence for architectural discourse. The anecdotal evidence linked to this hotel exists primarily in the forms of stories and gossip, for example, the animal stories associated with the Billiard Room, and the stories associated with Maugham writing in the Palm Court, and Maugham's own interest in gossip. Unsurprisingly, such anecdotal material is not normally embraced as part of the hotel's architectural narrative. The anecdote, as architectural historian Barbara Penner points out, is regarded with suspicion and often alienated in academic discourse.⁷² Dictionary definitions link the anecdote to 'a tendency to tell too many stories', and oppose it to 'corroborated evidence or proof'.⁷³ I see the anecdote as a transgressive feminine approach to architectural knowledge since it is not limited to positions of authority, and circulates without control. Following Penner, I argue that knowledge pursued through

⁷² Barbara Penner, 'Researching Female Public Toilets: Gendered Spaces, Disciplinary Limits', in *Journal of International Women's Studies*, (June 2005), v.6, n.2, pp.81-98.

⁷³ *The New Penguin English Dictionary* (London: Penguin Books, 2001), p.48.

the denigrated anecdote should be reclaimed as part of a feminist, 'self-reflexive' position to knowing, which critiques the notion of 'completeness' or fool-proof authority of one's architectural interpretation.⁷⁴ The risk of the anecdote lies in acknowledging the experiencing subject's agency and the partiality of her architectural encounter.

Here, I want to draw attention to two primary anecdotal formats, which I suggest are central to the architectural interpretation of the Raffles Hotel, namely, storytelling and gossip. Traditionally denigrated as idle female pursuits, storytelling and gossip have recently been reclaimed by feminists as critical feminine practices.⁷⁵ Jane Rendell reminds us that storytelling is a relational practice, 'Storytelling describes the world through connections ... narrative understanding is a way of "seeing things together." In sequence or in juxtaposition, what happens to things when they are next to one another?'⁷⁶ Walter Benjamin also stresses the relational aspects of storytelling. He points out that unlike the isolated experience of a novel's reader or historical narratives' (over)determined '*one hero, one odyssey, one battle*',⁷⁷ the story necessarily unfolds as a relational encounter between its teller and her audience, 'Storytellers tend to begin their story with a presentation of the circumstances in which they themselves have learned

⁷⁴ Penner, 'Researching Female Public Toilets', p.92.

⁷⁵ See for example, Angela Carter, 'Introduction', in Angela Carter (ed.), *The Virago Book of Fairy Tales* (London: Virago, 1990), pp.ix-xxii; Marina Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and Their Tellers* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1994), p.xx; Louise Collins, 'Gossip: A Feminist Defence', in Robert F. Goodman and Aaron Ben-Ze'ev (eds.), *Good Gossip* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1994), pp.106-14; Maryann Ayim, "'Knowledge Through the Grapevine": Gossip as Inquiry', in Goodman and Ze'ev, *Good Gossip*, pp.85-99.

⁷⁶ Jane Rendell, 'An Atlas of the Welsh Dresser,' in *Surface Tension: Problematics of Site*, eds. Ken Ehrlich and Brandon Labelle (New York: Errant Bodies, 2003), p.288.

⁷⁷ Walter Benjamin, 'The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov,' in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (London: Pimlico, 1999), pp.83-107; here, p.97.

what is to follow'.⁷⁸ The teller internalizes the story, either from first-hand experience or through another's telling, and in retelling it anew herself, explores and constructs 'the rhythm of the work (that) has seized' her.⁷⁹ Besides imprinting the narrative with her 'tracks ... if not as those of the one who experienced it, then as those of the one who reports it',⁸⁰ the teller surrenders the story over to her audience by giving them the freedom of making their own meanings, 'It is left up to him to interpret the way he understands them, and thus the narrative achieves an *amplitude* that information lacks'.⁸¹ Similarly, gossip has been appropriated as a 'subversive form of power' typically by those who have limited access to conventional forms of power, for example, women.⁸² Literary theorist Maryann Ayim who argues for gossip as a form of inquiry, suggests that gossip is 'women's speech' which has been 'outlawed by patriarchy'.⁸³ It is also a transgressive form of knowledge production that operates through positions of trust and relational exchange rather than through modes of authority.

In reclaiming anecdotal material as central to the construction of the hotel's architectural meanings, the hotel's floral and animal associations, which have not been seriously considered as part of its architectural account, are key, as I propose in the following chapter and further elaborate through *Flora* (Part Two) and *Fauna* (Part Three). While the notion of exploring the hotel through its flora and fauna may not seem incongruous with a 'tropical' architectural context, it is an interpretation based on this experiencing

⁷⁸ Benjamin, 'The Storyteller,' p.91.

⁷⁹ Benjamin, 'The Storyteller,' p.91.

⁸⁰ Benjamin, 'The Storyteller,' p.91.

⁸¹ Benjamin, 'The Storyteller,' p.87. Emphasis mine.

⁸² Ronald de Sousa, 'In Praise of Gossip: Indiscretion as a Saintly Virtue', in Goodman and Ze'ev, *Good Gossip*, pp.25-33; here p.25. See also Patricia Meyer Spacks, *Gossip* (New York: Knopf, 1985), p.30.

⁸³ Ayim, "'Knowledge Through the Grapevine'", p.95. See also Deborah Jones, 'Gossip: Notes on Women's Oral Culture', in *Women's Studies International Quarterly*, (1980), v.3, n.3, pp.193-8.

subject's specific intimate encounter, which is suggested here. The specificity of the architectural interpretation, made in relation to this intimate encounter challenges the current pattern of architectural discourse in the Southeast Asian context. It is to this geographical, and I will ultimately argue, ideological architectural context, that the present discussion now shifts.

Contesting Architectural Identity Discourse

The Southeast Asian architectural context is defined by an unequivocal aim, that is, to use architectural analysis as a medium for investigating the post-independent nation's identity. As a result, the research of many Singapore-based architectural academics and designers – those working with architectural history for example, Jon S. H. Lim, Lai Chee-Kien, Chang Jiat-Hwee, and Wong Yunn-Chii; or those who critique contemporary architecture, for example Phillip Bay, Tan Hock-Beng, William Lim and Tay Kheng-Soon – have focused on reinterpreting Singapore and/or Asian architecture as part of an identity discourse linked to the architectural processes, problems and aesthetics of non-Western, non-First World localized self-definition and urban development.⁸⁴ Often applied to the discourse of architectural objects located in

⁸⁴ It should be emphasized that although these authors commonly deal with the nation and architectural identity discourse, they occupy different critical positions in relation to the issue. See for example, Wong Yunn-Chii, 'Discourse on Tropical Architecture: Its Meanings and Stakes in Colonial Singapore', in *Singapore Architect*, (2002), n.213, pp.78-83; Lai Chee-Kien, *Concrete/Concentric Nationalism: The Architecture of Independence in Malaysia, 1945-1969* (PhD dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 2005); Jon S. H. Lim (ed.), *Transforming Traditions: Architecture in the ASEAN Countries: Brunei, Malaysia, Indonesia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand* (Singapore: ASEAN Committee on Culture and Information, 2001); Chang Jiat-Hwee, 'Hybrid Modernities and Tropical Architecture in Southeast Asia', in *DOCOMOMO*, (September 2003), n. 29, pp.76-

developing and/or postcolonial regions, this discourse of architectural identity champions an architectural process that re-envisioned a critical, local architectural tradition and practice, which has been neglected in Western architectural discourse and which, when reinvigorated, challenges the status of the former. The architectural identity discourses of these newly developed and developing countries, including Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines, have also aligned with postcolonial theory as an intellectual expression of the nations' struggle for self-identity.⁸⁵

A major strand of this architectural identity discourse is marked by critiques posed through a 'critical regionalist'⁸⁶ position, which functions as an 'architecture of resistance' against the Western architectural status quo, defined simply as the blight posed by homogenous Modernist architecture.⁸⁷ By simultaneously cultivating the particularities of a local place and striving to become modern, its pioneers, initially, Alexander Tzonis and Liane Lefaivre, and later, Kenneth Frampton, carefully distinguished 'critical regionalism' from romantic regionalism by aligning the former with the 'resistant,

81; Tay Kheng-Soon, 'Architecture and National Identity', in *SLA7*, (July/Aug 1990), n.161, pp.13-15; Tan Hock-Beng, 'Modernizing Appropriations/ Appropriating Modernity', in Alexander Tzonis, Liane Lefaivre and Bruno Stagno (eds.), *Tropical architecture: Critical Regionalism in the Age of Globalization* (Chichester: Wiley-Academy, 2001), pp.93-103; Philip Bay, 'Three Tropical Design Paradigms', in Tzonis, Lefaivre and Bruno, *Tropical Architecture*, pp.229-65. The 1995 seminar by the Architectural Association Asia group in Singapore (hosted by architect Kerry Hill) and the 2001 'Neo-Tropicality' Tropical Workshop Series at the National University of Singapore (led by architect Chan Soo-Khian) both addressed issues of regional identity through explorations of the contemporary vernacular and neo-tropicalism.

⁸⁵ See Anoma Pieris, 'The Search for Tropical Identities: A Critical History', in Philip Goad and Anoma Pieris, *New Directions in Tropical Asian Architecture* (Singapore: Periplus, 2005), pp.22-33.

⁸⁶ The term 'critical regionalism' was first introduced by Alexander Tzonis and Liane Lefaivre in the 1980s. It was later used by Kenneth Frampton. See Alexander Tzonis and Liane Lefaivre, 'The Grid and the Pathway', in *Architecture in Greece* (1981), n.15, pp.164-78; Alexander Tzonis and Liane Lefaivre, *Critical Regionalism: Architecture and Identity in a Globalised World* (Munich: Prestel, 2003).

⁸⁷ See Kenneth Frampton, 'Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for An Architecture of Resistance', in Hal Foster (ed.), *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture* (Washington: Bay Press, 1983), pp.16-30.

reformist and conscience-pricking' critical theories of the Frankfurt School.⁸⁸ By using 'critical regionalism' as an interpretive tool in architectural analysis, questions about the relationship between place, modernity, tradition and cultural identity were raised.⁸⁹

In the 1990s, Tzonis and Lefaivre extended the critical regionalist argument to the framework of 'tropical architecture',⁹⁰ thus engaging a largely developing and once-colonized region of the world, which shared not only a hot and humid climate but also a postcolonial⁹¹ anxiety for self-definition through architectural means. Yet, 'tropical architecture' is not a new concept. 'The Tropics' is the name given to a geographical area bracketed by the Tropic of Cancer and the Tropic of Capricorn. In her critical history of tropical architectural identities, architectural historian Anoma Pieris traces the term to its nineteenth-century colonial roots where 'Tropical Asia' (i.e. British-ruled Southeast Asia and India) was represented as a fertile yet chaotic and degenerate landscape, 'a feminized object of desire'⁹² that had to be possessed and controlled. The tropical 'trope' re-emerged in the 1950s, this time in a series of architectural conferences held in Europe, which focused on developing innovative architecture for former colonies in the tropical regions.⁹³ There was sufficient interest to warrant a tropical architecture

⁸⁸ Keith L. Eggener, 'Placing Resistance: A Critique of Critical Regionalism', in *Journal of Architectural Education*, (May 2002), v.55, n.4, pp.228-37; here p.230.

⁸⁹ Eggener, 'Placing Resistance', p.230.

⁹⁰ Significantly, of the thirteen essays featured in Tzonis, Lefaivre and Stagno's *Tropical Architecture*, three are contributed by Singapore-based academics/writers – Tay Kheng-Soon, Tan Hock-Beng and Philip Bay.

⁹¹ Both Eggener and architectural historian Anoma Pieris have linked tropical and regionalist discourses to a 'postcolonial' agenda. Eggener, 'Placing Resistance', pp.234-5; Pieris, 'The Search for Tropical Identities', p.23.

⁹² Pieris, 'The Search for Tropical Identities', p.23.

⁹³ Lai Chee-Kien, 'Tropical Tropes: The Architectural Politics of Building in Hot and Humid Climates', unpublished paper presented at '(Un)Bounding Tradition: The Tensions of Borders and Regions', 8th IASTE International Conference, Hong Kong, 12-15 December 2002, unpaginated, cited by Pieris, 'The Search for Tropical Identities', p.24.

diploma programme initially led by Maxwell Fry at London's Architectural Association in 1954. As Pieris argues, 'The "tropical" could be read as anti-colonial, anti-traditionalist and anti-International Style', and it was subsequently used as a mediating term to define an architectural identity that was 'innocuous, and inclusive' of a 'common history' shared by 'once colonized territories of South and Southeast Asia' which could also 'accommodate the key tenets of Modernism'.⁹⁴

The regionalist method and other existing Southeast Asian architectural research focused on national and/or regional identity has no doubt highlighted neglected architectural activity in this region. Existing research has also undeniably raised architectural subjects and histories, which have previously not been examined. However, the application of this epistemological framework for the majority of Southeast Asian architecture, I contend, creates some serious blindspots in the region's architectural knowledge.⁹⁵

First, despite its call for localized specificity, the issue of national or regional 'identity' is usually attached to an abstract referent for example, a common region, a people, or an entire postcolonial nation. Not only is nationalism, as argued earlier, a masculine gendered discourse, the abstract referent is problematic because it is unclear who exactly is entitled to speak, who is presently speaking and in what position, and whose identity is at stake. As literary critic Alberto Moreiras asserts, any critical analysis of identity needs

⁹⁴ Pieris, 'The Search for Tropical Identities', p.29.

⁹⁵ For limits on postcolonial and regionalist debates outside architecture, see for example, Ella Shohat, 'Notes on the "Post-Colonial"', in *Social Text* (1992), n.31/32, pp.99-113; Jane M. Jacobs, *Edge of Empire: Postcolonialism and the City* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp.13-14, pp.22-37; Dane Kennedy, 'Imperial History and Post-Colonial Theory', in *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, (September 1996), v.24, n.3, pp.345-63.

to radically critique its own motivations,⁹⁶ and to reiterate the self-reflexive questions asked by feminist cultural theorist Ella Shohat, it is necessary to persistently ask: 'Who is mobilizing what in the articulation of the past, developing what identities and representations, and in the name of what political visions and goals?'⁹⁷ Second, as literary theorist David Scott has discussed in relation to postcolonial literary critique, rather than developing its own epistemological frameworks, postcolonial architectural discourse has frequently operated 'by implicitly occupying the horizon of nationalist projects already defined by the anti-colonial project', which works unproblematically through binary oppositions rather than negotiating through complex and specific relational positions.⁹⁸ Following the argument of architectural theorist Keith Eggener, I contend that such a position is not only co-existent with power and invested with national interests,⁹⁹ the undisturbed anticolonial-turned-postcolonial epistemological structure ultimately limits the range of architectural issues discussed, and tends to overlook other equally urgent themes, which fall outside the remits of this narrow and exclusive agenda. Third, the regionalist/tropical/postcolonial approach favours the architect's perspective, and paradoxically, the contested and elusive notion of national or regional identity is ultimately projected onto the architect and his architecture.¹⁰⁰ Fourth and finally, I

⁹⁶ Alberto Moreiras, 'Afterword: Pastiche Identity and Allegory of Allegory', in Amaryll Chanady (ed.), *Latin American Identity and Constructions of Difference* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), pp.204-38; here p.208.

⁹⁷ Shohat, 'Notes on the "Post-Colonial"', p.110.

⁹⁸ David Scott, *Refashioning Futures: Criticism After Postcoloniality* (Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 1999), p.14.

⁹⁹ Eggener, 'Placing Resistance', p.228.

¹⁰⁰ See for example the elite architects examined in Lefavre and Tzonis's *Critical Regionalism*.

argue that this approach emphasizes the autonomous production of the architectural object over complexities posed through architectural occupation, use and experience.¹⁰¹

I contend here that ‘postcolonial’ architectural engagements in the Southeast Asian context have ultimately oversimplified postcoloniality to show how ‘rooted’ regional identities are architecturally manifested through manipulation of architectural forms, functions and styles. Following architectural theorist Alan Colquhoun’s argument, the notion of ‘identity’ linked to ‘rootedness’ of place may no longer be relevant in a post-industrialist society.¹⁰² More insidiously, the subversive reputation of postcolonial discourse has been appropriated by the Southeast Asian architectural status quo to champion an essentially imposed perspective of national or regional identity.

Yet as an intellectual framework outside architectural discourse, postcolonial theory to which the architectural identity discourses claim affiliation, is much more complex, being ‘concerned principally with the decolonization of representation’.¹⁰³ This concern recognizes that the representational structures of colonial knowledge are complicit with colonial power and that it is critical not only to find new forms of content but also new forms of expression,¹⁰⁴ which ultimately requires the taking apart of epistemological structures. Rather than rehabilitating the colonialist expressions with national, tropical, regionalist or postcolonial content, what is required is no less than a ‘critique of

¹⁰¹ For architectural perspectives focused on occupation, use and experience, see for example, the work of Iain Borden, Jane Rendell, Barbara Penner, Adrian Forty and Jonathan Hill, mentioned in *Prologue*, p.25.

¹⁰² Alan Colquhoun, ‘The Concept of Regionalism’, in G. B. Nalbantoglu and C. T. Wong (eds.), *Postcolonial Space(s)* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1997), pp.13-24.

¹⁰³ Scott, *Refashioning Futures*, p.12.

¹⁰⁴ Dorothea Olkowski, *Gilles Deleuze and the Ruin of Representation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), p.10-11.

objectified representation' so that truly new points of view may be created.¹⁰⁵ In other words, it is the architectural method itself, which must be called into question. This argument is similar to the one made by feminist architectural theorists and historians, who have shifted from a previous emphasis on examining the place of women and their identities in architecture, towards developing new critical feminine approaches to architectural knowledge, which privilege sexual difference.¹⁰⁶

Through her reading of Gilles Deleuze's philosophy of difference, feminist philosopher Dorothea Olkowski argues that the 'logic of identity' operates through the representation of a known paradigm, which limits 'forms of thinking and acting'¹⁰⁷ to relationships based on 'identity, opposition, analogy and resemblance'¹⁰⁸ subservient to an established model. 'Such a way of seeing the world both assumes and produces spatial and temporal homogeneity,' Olkowski reminds us, 'and in leaving out the impact of the point of view of the observer, it produces knowledge of the world defined neutrally as a copy of reality, as representation. The effect of this epistemology is to constitute the world without a knower and without a point of view'.¹⁰⁹ In this case, should a discussion of the hotel follow prevalent regionalist architectural discourse, it would face the problems Olkowski highlights, namely: Who is being represented by this architectural discourse and who is interpreting, and from where? Olkowski's approach, articulated as 'the ruin of

¹⁰⁵ Olkowski, *The Ruin of Representation*, p.11.

¹⁰⁶ See Jane Rendell, 'Introduction: "Gender, Space, Architecture"', in Jane Rendell, Barbara Penner and Iain Borden (eds.), *Gender Space Architecture: An Interdisciplinary Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp.225-39.

¹⁰⁷ Olkowski, *The Ruin of Representation*, p.13, p.15.

¹⁰⁸ Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), pp.34-35, cited by Olkowski, *The Ruin of Representation*, p.20.

¹⁰⁹ Catherine MacKinnon, *Feminism Unmodified* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1987), p.96, p.97, cited by Olkowski, *The Ruin of Representation*, p.9.

representation', imagines a catastrophic break from this static and 'blind' model of representation, so that the logic of identity is replaced by the logic of difference, which considers incompatibility and partiality of located viewpoints as critical modes of knowing.¹¹⁰ Not unlike Julia Kristeva, Jane Rendell, Karen Bermann, Katja Grillner and Jennifer Bloomer's move towards new spatio-temporal contexts, Olkowski's philosophical critique of existing representational structures also aims to produce 'a ruin of hierarchically ordered space and time' where embodied life critically intersects abstract thought.¹¹¹

Particularly resonant with Kristeva's notion of language's symbolic aspect is Olkowski's assertion that meaning-making is ultimately overdetermined by the type of signifiers we use, or are compelled to use, in interpreting an object.¹¹² Olkowski's argument references Deleuze's call for a performative use of language as a creative and critical means of producing new forms of knowledge. Deleuze argues that the framing of questions using 'society's' repetitive 'order-words' encourages homogeneity, 'Language transmits the society's "order-words" and in them, the ready-made problems that society forces us to solve'.¹¹³ The notion of 'order-word' is itself creatively used by Deleuze to mean both, a word that constitutes a command, as well as a word or phrase, which

¹¹⁰ Olkowski, *The Ruin of Representation*, p.20. Olkowski's concept of 'ruin' may be compared to Walter Benjamin's ruination of the historical 'fragment' in which the reader's active participation in constructing a constellation of new meanings within a prescribed historical context is key. See Graeme Gilloch, *Walter Benjamin: Critical Constellations* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002).

¹¹¹ Olkowski, *The Ruin of Representation*, p.2.

¹¹² Olkowski, *The Ruin of Representation*, p.211-34.

¹¹³ Gilles Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (New York: Zone Books, 2002), p.15, cited by Olkowski, *The Ruin of Representation*, p.89. See also Dorothea Olkowski, 'Semiotics and Gilles Deleuze', in Thomas A. Sebeok and Jean Umiker-Sebeok (eds.), *Recent Developments in Theory and History: The Semiotic Web 1990* (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1991), pp.285-305; especially pp.292-3.

creates order.¹¹⁴ What Deleuze implies is that the symbolic meanings of society's 'order-words' ultimately control not only *how* we can articulate a problem (our forms of expression), but also restricts *what* we can know (our forms of content).

For example, existing Southeast Asian architectural identity discourse operates through a set of 'order-words' such as 'colonial' and 'tropical', which are entrenched with established meanings linked to notions of national and regionalist identity formations. When an architectural object located in this region is subjected to these 'order-words', its articulation and terms of engagement are limited. To confront this problem, Deleuze suggests that a 'semiotic transformation' must occur within the usage of the same order-words, that is, the same words may exist but they can be made to function differently.¹¹⁵ In relation to this concept, the term 'tropical' for example, may be creatively used to achieve a subversive effect. Here, I draw on a literary example to illustrate a 'semiotic transformation' of what is currently understood as 'tropical architecture'.

In proclaiming to the city of London, 'I am going to tropicalize you!'¹¹⁶ the character Gibreel in Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* transforms the term 'tropical' from a noun attached to fixed meanings and objects into an verb whose effects, he actively determines:

Gibreel enumerated the benefits of the proposed metamorphosis of London into a tropical city: increased moral definition, institution of a national siesta,

¹¹⁴ In his notes to the translation, Brian Massumi suggests that the 'order-word' is used by Deleuze and Guattari literally in a double sense: 'a word or phrase constituting a command or a word or phrase creative of order'. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (London: Athlone Press, 1999), p.76, p.523.

¹¹⁵ Olkowski, *The Ruin of Representation*, pp.226-9.

¹¹⁶ Salman Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses* (London: Vintage, 1998), p.354.

development of vivid and expansive patterns of behaviour among the populace, ... new birds in the trees (macaws, peacocks, cockatoos), new trees under the birds (coco-palms, tamarind, banyan with hanging beards). Improved street-life, outrageously coloured flowers (magenta, vermillion, neon-green), spider-monkeys in the oaks. ... Standing upon the horizon, spreading his arms to fill the sky, Gibreel cried: 'Let it be.'¹¹⁷

Here, Rushdie's idea of 'the tropical' is not limited to a static referent but instead refers to a series of effects, events, fragments, relationships, textures and stories that come together to construct a tropical imaginary. The tropical is a condition that Gibreel himself literally performs on the city. Additionally, his performative utterance 'I shall tropicalize you' asserts that 'the tropical' is not a given category. It is a performative condition that happens by using the expansive force of the imagination and association to transform one's perception of a physical space.

Rushdie's performative use of 'the tropical' suggests multiple meanings for the 'tropical'. In the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, 'the tropical' was annexed to a host of colonial pursuits for instance, 'tropical medicine', 'tropical geography', 'tropical ecology', 'tropical agriculture', 'tropical economics' and 'tropical hydrology'.¹¹⁸ As geographer David Livingstone remarks, '... the tropics have habitually been theologized, aestheticized, scienticized, medicalized, and moralized'.¹¹⁹ Noting the term's mutability in usage and meanings under different conditions, Livingstone astutely observes that 'the

¹¹⁷ Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, p.355.

¹¹⁸ David N. Livingstone, 'Tropical Hermeneutics: Fragments for a Historical Narrative, An Afterword', in *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography*, (2000), v.21, n.1, pp.92-8; here p.96.

¹¹⁹ Livingstone, 'Tropical Hermeneutics', p.96.

tropical' is a fertile hermeneutic construct, suitable for scientific domestication and slippery enough to exist as the 'other'.¹²⁰ While current architectural use of this term has been limited to definitions of a local architectural style and/or to revive a politicized regionalist identity, we might instead choose to take advantage of its 'hermeneutic fecundity'.¹²¹ Thus, rather than ascribing regionalist perspectives or progressive vernacular forms, can 'the tropical' be performatively used in architectural discourse? In this dissertation, this proposition entails the transformation of the 'tropical' 'order-word' from its symbolic meaning assigned by the Southeast Asian regionalist context, into critical architectural 'plots' activated by this experiencing subject's intimate encounter with the hotel's tropical floral and animal associations.¹²²

A Feminist (postcolonial) Approach

In this chapter, I have described the empirical contexts of this thesis. I have outlined the historical background of the Raffles Hotel and suggested, through an examination of its architectural modalities, that there are discrepancies between how this architecture is customarily encountered by the experiencing subject through its popular floral and animal associations on the one hand, and its emergent architectural history as a National Monument on the other hand. I have also linked the representation of the National Monument to prevalent architectural national and/or regional identity discourses in Southeast Asia. I discussed the Southeast Asian architectural research context – an area

¹²⁰ Livingstone, 'Tropical Hermeneutics', p.96.

¹²¹ Livingstone, 'Tropical Hermeneutics', p.96.

¹²² The notion of 'plot' is discussed in *An Architecture of Intimate Encounter*, pp.151-8.

in which my own research is located – and its agenda to manifest nationalist and regionalist self-definition through architectural discourse. I argued that this method, although important and necessary, has its limitations.

The nationalist agenda reflects a masculine perspective and is problematic in that it is unclear whose identity is at stake and who is entitled to speak. Such a method rehabilitates rather than dismantles colonialist epistemological frameworks such that biases towards issues such as gender, race and class remain repressed, while binary oppositions inherited from colonialist discourse, for example, East-West, self-other, vernacular-modern, are maintained. This architectural identity discourse also favours an architect-centred perspective, and projects the complex and contested notion of ‘identity’ onto the architect and his work. The method also assumes that architectural production is unrelated to subject positions outside of the architect’s, and as such, overlooks issues of occupation, use and experience.

Through Olkowski and Deleuze, I proposed that the hotel’s emergent architectural history, which operates through a logic of regionalist identity focused on (over)determined meanings and architectural forms, would limit other architectural issues, and inhibit new questions because this process is ultimately controlled by the symbolic language of this architectural identity discourse’s ‘order-words’. Rather than prescribing a predetermined national identity and denoting a specific architectural style, I ended by suggesting that ‘the tropical’ could suggest interpretative uncertainty in architectural discourse.

By pursuing an approach that requires critical mediation between architectural knowledge offered through an architect-centred perspective and the intimate encounter of the experiencing subject, the architecture of intimate encounter makes a radical and original contribution to Southeast Asian architectural discourse. This new method emphasizes that the 'architectural subject' is not a construction 'without a knower and without a point of view' but critically considers how the experiencing subject is implicitly involved in the interpretation of the architectural object.

In this sense, this thesis's approach is more akin to that of *feminist* postcolonial theorists and writers operating outside architectural discourse, for example, Trinh T. Minh-Ha, bell hooks, Gloria Anzaldúa, Ien Ang and Rey Chow.¹²³ For these feminist postcolonial theorists, identity and epistemology are relational and contingent constructs; identity is never bounded, assigned or stable, but is necessarily a contested, relational and embodied construction – a risky position that is sometimes 'interstitial', other times 'subversively marginal', or 'hybrid'.¹²⁴ The question of knowing how one knows is inevitably marked by ambiguities, complexities and contradictions.¹²⁵ Rather than pursuing a single regional architectural identity, it is this complex issue, that is, being self-reflexive towards my own architectural process of knowing, which the present inquiry attempts to engage.

¹²³ See for example, Ien Ang, *On Not Speaking Chinese: Living Between Asia and the West* (London: Routledge, 2001); Rey Chow, *Writing Diaspora: Tactics of Intervention in Contemporary Cultural Study* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993); bell hooks, *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (Boston: South End Press, 1990); Gloria Anzaldúa and Analouise Keating, *This Bridge We Call Home: Radical Visions for Transformations* (New York: Routledge, 2002); Trinh T. Minh-Ha, *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989).

¹²⁴ Chow adopts an 'in-between' mode of critique, bell hooks talks about operating subversively from 'the margin', and Ang is interested in developing hybrid methods of inquiry.

¹²⁵ Ang, *On Not Speaking Chinese*, pp.1-17.

The architecture of intimate encounter seeks to problematize the emergent patriarchal architectural histories of this colonial National Monument. It attempts to reclaim critical feminine modes of knowledge, which have been repressed by the masculine epistemological structure manifested through the monumentalization of this hotel and its inclusion into a national identity discourse. Thus, while the architectural object may not explicitly involve the study of women, this project implicitly operates through a feminist agenda, and challenges dominant masculine epistemological perspectives within Southeast Asian architectural discourse.

3

An Architecture of Intimate Encounter

How is the ‘architectural subject’ constituted by its experiencing subject? In the last two chapters, I engaged this question by exploring theoretical and empirical contexts relevant to this research. I examined Kristeva’s theory of signification in which meaning-making is proposed as a negotiation between a collective symbolic order and the individual’s semiotic impulse, and her call for a radical spatio-temporal context through the concept of ‘women’s time’. These notions were reflected against the work four feminist architectural theorists, for whom the experiencing subject plays a key role in the construction of the architectural subject. I also sketched out the position of the hotel in its designated role as a National Monument and its emergent architectural history, which I suggested, mirrored the regionalist and nationalist architectural identity discourses dominant in the Southeast Asian architectural context. I also argued that the valorization of the hotel’s colonial history and its monumentalization constitute a gendered epistemology, albeit a patriarchal one.

While the hotel’s emergent architectural history implies a generic knower, privileges an architect-centred perspective and claims that the hotel’s architectural meanings are categorically linked to aspects of nationhood, the architecture of intimate encounter undermines these assertions.¹ I propose that the intimate encounter is informed by an architectural fabric that is excessive to this emergent architectural history. The intimate

¹ See *Empirical Contexts*, pp.99-109.

encounter is woven out of the particular, the incompatible and the subjective, intersecting with, and transforming the hotel's normative representations and its emergent architectural history. Here, I use the term 'fabric' performatively – taking up Deleuze's call for a 'semiotic transformation' of 'order-words'² – to rethink architectural production. 'Fabric' is typically associated with materials, textures and structures used for architectural construction, for example, a fabrication of stone, brick, glass, cement, mortar, wood, or steel. But in picking the term 'fabric' here, there is an intentional shift towards a more fluid understanding of the word. 'Fabric' depicts a fragile construction made out of different parts, and held tenuously together by interwoven threads. To fabricate means also to make up, to complexify, or to construct through creative or even subversive, means.³ This kind of multiplicity and complexity is evident in Bloomer's interpretation of brocade:

Brocade or broach (to make a hole with a pointed rod or pin or needle, or to begin to talk about) come from the same word, the Vulgar Latin *broca*, a spike. Punching holes, undermining, slipping in and out, leaving threads behind. ... Not the space of Ariadne, but of Arachne. Brocade involves perplexity because perplexity is the technique of its making.⁴

Fabrication suggests a constellation of parts, both within and without a common architectural vocabulary. Hence, one should not only consider established design

² See *Empirical Contexts*, pp.116-9.

³ For an interpretation 'fabrication' as a dynamic act and bodily production, see Clare Cardinal-Pett, 'Detailing', in Duncan McCorquodale, Katerina Ruedi and Sarah Wigglesworth (eds.), *Desiring Practices: Architecture, Gender and the Interdisciplinary* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 1996), pp.88-105; especially p.98, p.103.

⁴ Jennifer Bloomer, 'D'Or' in Beatriz Colomina (ed.), *Sexuality and Space* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1992), pp.163-83; here p.178.

strategies, canonical and regional histories, building typologies, an architect, a style, ornamentation, innovative use of materials, forms or function but also the capacity to actively engage associations drawn from the experiencing subject's encounter with the architectural object. What informs an architectural discourse fabricated by intimate encounter?

The architecture of intimate encounter is a kind of 'minor architecture'⁵ unmoored from Architecture (with a capital 'A'), such that the 'architectural subject' is fundamentally constituted as a 'double subject', which brings the architectural object and the experiencing subject's agency into precarious proximity. By the 'intimate', I do not imply the personal but emphasize the inter-subjective web of relationships prioritized by, and forged between, the experiencing subject's relationship with specific spaces, bodies, objects and events related to the architectural object she examines. In actuality, the experiencing subject's architectural subjectivity is conditioned not just by her personal make-up (for example, who she is, where she is located, what issues interests her) but equally mediated by cultural influences related to her architectural object of study (for example, established meanings, methods and histories). The resultant discourse attempts to explore this interpersonal process of architectural signification.

The notion of 'encounter' conceptually sets out a relationship of, at least, two spatio-temporal frameworks – a contemporary one belonging to the experiencing subject, and another belonging to the architectural object, which may involve various other histories, spaces and subjects. The architecture of intimate encounter proposes a radically different discourse in that it does not seek to interpret the architectural object within a

⁵ Jennifer Bloomer, *Architecture and the Text: The (S)cripts of Joyce and Piranesi* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), p.36.

specific historical context, hierarchically ordered and prioritized through chronological historical time. The emphasis here is to understand the *compositional possibilities* of a chronologically complex space-time that arises from the experiencing subject's contemporary encounter with an architectural space in which, different times, subjects and spaces are compositionally juxtaposed.

Although historiography recognizes that 'history' is constructed through an interpretation made in the present context,⁶ I suggest following Katja Grillner, that an architectural history perceived through a context that privileges both time *and* space, is made complex not just chronologically but transforms how the experiencing subject can engage and inhabit this architectural history. Grillner's work, for example, presents architectural history as a speculative dialogue across different times and subjects, mediated through a shared architectural space.⁷ Her perspective reclaims historiography as an imaginative spatio-temporal activity, where the experiencing subject's engagement with her architectural object of study is advanced through analytical discourse as well as speculative interpretation. This approach is akin to what I mean by 'compositional possibilities', which arise from the intimate encounter. Or to reiterate Iain Borden and Jane Rendell, architectural history is also concerned with

⁶ For arguments of history as a methodological approach based on a critical, self-reflexive historiographical practice, see Keith Jenkins, *Re-Thinking History* (London: Routledge, 1991); Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse* (London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978); Iain Borden and Jane Rendell, 'From Chamber to Transformer: Epistemological Challenges and Tendencies in the Intersection of Architectural Histories', in Iain Borden and Jane Rendell (eds.), *Intersections: Architectural Histories and Critical Theories* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp.3-23.

⁷ Katja Grillner, 'Writing and Landscape – Setting Scenes for Critical Reflection', in *The Journal of Architecture*, (Summer 2003), v.8, pp.239-49. For my discussion on Grillner's work, see *Theoretical Contexts*, pp.68-71.

‘possible meanings and potential occurrences,’ and thus, ‘is as much in the realm of the perhaps and the maybe as in the therefore and the consequently’.⁸

It is important to emphasize that my use of the term ‘architectural space’ is not limited to the physical space of buildings. Rather, ‘architectural space’ is conceived as a creative assemblage of overlapping physical, historical and psychical spaces that may take on changeable compositions.⁹ This chapter develops the intimate encounter by exploring its three key aspects – the relational experiencing subject, her spatio-temporal construction, and the intimate detail. Envisaged as a new theoretical method for architectural discourse, I locate the intimate encounter in the context of the Raffles Hotel by examining the hotel’s alternative architectural fabric, constituted through its floral and animal associations, and their resultant ‘plots’.

Spiderweb: The Relational Experiencing Subject and The Spatio-Temporal Web

While the architect is central in architectural discourse, the agency of the experiencing subject, barring several exceptions, remains relatively neglected.¹⁰ Conventional architectural discourse regards architectural texts and spaces as inherently objective in

⁸ Borden and Rendell, ‘From Chamber to Transformer’, p.14.

⁹ I see Deleuze’s abstract and disembodied ‘time-out-of-joint’ as a parallel proposition to Kristeva’s ‘women’s time’. My own version of an ‘architectural time-out-of-joint’ borrows from both concepts, and is based on an embodied idea of space-time. This notion is developed later in this chapter under the section ‘Spiderweb’, pp.134-7.

¹⁰ For exceptions to this architect-centred perspective, I refer here to the architectural research of Iain Borden, Barbara Penner, Jonathan Hill, Adrian Forty, Jane Rendell, Katja Grillner, Jennifer Bloomer and Karen Bermann. See *Prologue*, pp.25-6.

their content, and sees the experiencing subject as no more than a passive agent. However, this assumption is misleading because architecture is inhabitable and experiential. Here, it is worthwhile revisiting arguments from anthropology, literary criticism and feminist theory, which sound out a critical understanding of the experiencing subject's role in shaping discourse.

Anthropologist James Clifford problematizes the artificial distancing between the researcher and his field subject. He cogently argues how the researcher is always already spatially related in the field of research.¹¹ For me, Clifford's observation is interesting not only because he acknowledges the constructed and spatial nature of an analysis but also because his conclusion appears to hint at a key question: How can the researcher's 'itinerary of desire'¹² be critically articulated through writing, that is to say, what sort of texts will make room for this reflexivity without simply collapsing into the personal? Clifford suggests a 'hermeneutics of "vulnerability"' to enable alternative models of dialogue between "researcher "self" and researched "other".¹³ This perspective inevitably fractures the purity of fieldwork and questions the objective sanctity of spaces like the archive or the field. The researcher as experiencing subject is presented as necessarily flawed, divided, imperfect and the experience of research is radically

¹¹ James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1997), p.25, pp.52-91.

¹² I borrow this phrase from Alison Lee: 'The task of the analyst, ... might be productively engaged in questioning the conditions of its production, its assumptions and ascriptions of agency in research practice and in the "itinerary of desire" of the analyst'. Alison Lee, 'Discourse Analysis and Cultural (Re)Writing', in Alison Lee and Cate Poyton (eds.), *Culture and Text: Discourse and Methodology in Social Research and Cultural Studies* (Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2000), pp.188-202; here, p.201.

¹³ Kevin Dwyer, 'On The Dialogic of Fieldwork', in *Dialectical Anthropology*, (1977), v.2, n.2, pp.143-51, cited by James Clifford, 'On Ethnographic Authority', in *Representations*, (1983), v.1, n.2, pp.118-46; here p.134. Clifford cited by Lee, 'Discourse Analysis', p.194.

conceptualized in ‘ways that “tear open the textualized fabric of the other, and thus also of the interpreting self”’.¹⁴

Feminist theories have also invested in notions of positionality in order to insist upon the situated specificity of one’s knowledge claims. Drawing attention to Donna Haraway’s ‘situated knowledges’, Jane Flax’s ‘standpoint theory’, Elspeth Probyn’s ‘locality’ and bell hooks’ ‘margin’, Rendell reminds us that ‘*Where I am makes a difference to who I can be and what I can know*’.¹⁵ Here, epistemological conditions are spatially inscribed, and ‘questioning the condition of (a text’s) production, its assumptions and ascriptions of agency’¹⁶ is key.

I find the theme of the experiencing subject and her relationship with her object of study most developed in literary criticism.¹⁷ It is from this field that I extrapolate an epistemological figure for the intimate encounter. Not coincidentally, this figure also relates to a kind of fabric. It is the spider and her web.

My interest in an alternative feminine process of knowing has led me to examine epistemological conditions embedded in mythical figures such as Penelope and her shroud (which woven by day and undone by night, becomes a sanctuary to ward off

¹⁴ Clifford, ‘On Ethnographic Authority’, p.134, cited by Lee, ‘Discourse Analysis’, p.194

¹⁵ Jane Rendell, *The Pursuit of Pleasure: Gender, Space and Architecture in Regency London* (London: Athlone Press, 2002), p.16.

¹⁶ Lee, ‘Discourse Analysis’, p.201.

¹⁷ For example, Nancy K. Miller, ‘Changing the Subject: Authorship, Writing and the Reader’, in *Subject to Change: Reading Feminist Writing* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), pp.102-21; Susan Rubin Suleiman, ‘Introduction: The Risk of Being Contemporary’, in *Risking Who One Is: Encounters with Contemporary Art and Literature* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1994), pp.1-12; Elspeth Probyn, “‘Après le texte qui vient?’: Ghosts in the (Missing) Text’, in Marysia Lewandowska (ed.), *The Missing Text* (London: Chance Books, 1991), pp.101-16.

unwanted suitors),¹⁸ Philomela and her robe (which transforms into a passage of secret messages connecting her mute self to her sister),¹⁹ and of course, Arachne, the village weaver from Ovid's fable who unwittingly took on the Goddess Athena in a dual to produce the finest tapestry. Arachne lost, because her 'feminocentric'²⁰ piece said too much:

... of erotomaniac gods, full of randy energy, infiltrating the world of creatures, even metals, to trick, to impregnate defenceless girls Arachne's tapestry is ... a rush of beings, a rush of animal, vegetable and mineral constantly coming into shape and constantly undone and re-forming.²¹

Instead of a neat and bounded composition, Arachne's web was energetically composed to display a space of intertwining figures – a 'rush' of humans, animal, vegetable and mineral. It also drew out themes, which had hitherto, been repressed. Consequently, the enraged Athena who identified with Olympian authority tore the web, beat her rival over the head with their shared emblem, the shuttle, and turned Arachne into a spider:

¹⁸ See Karen R. Lawrence, *Penelope Voyages: Women and Travel in the British Literary Tradition* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994); Margaret Atwood, *The Penelopiad: The Myth of Penelope and Odysseus* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2005).

¹⁹ See Ann Bergren, 'Architecture Gender Philosophy', in Richard Burdett, Jeffrey Kipnis, and John Whiteman (eds.), *Strategies in Architectural Thinking* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1992), pp.8-46, especially p.16.

²⁰ Nancy K. Miller, 'Arachnologies: The Woman, The Text, and the Critic', in *Subject to Change*, pp.77-101; here p.81.

²¹ A. S. Byatt, 'Arachne', in Philip Terry (ed.), *Ovid Metamorphosed* (London: Vintage, 2001), pp.131-57; here, p.141.

... her head withered and shrank; her body diminished and diminished; only her fingers remained, fringing her belly as fine legs. And from that remaining belly she spins still, the long spider-threads, the silk.²²

These descriptions come from a shape-shifting narrative of Arachne's plight interwoven with spider-inspired fictions and facts told by novelist A. S. Byatt. In *Arachne*, Byatt uses Arachne's embodied and intertwined tapestry to explore the reciprocity between real and fictional (literary, metaphorical, allegorical, artistic) spiders, and to think about how one's position is implicitly situated within an 'interconnected web'²³ that influences her knowing and telling. Byatt's narrative unfolds through her own version of an expansive web. Her text is spun through associative connections, which makes links through metaphor, and expressed through similar objects and/or concepts (spinning spiders and spinning women, for example) on the one hand, and through metonymy, which emphasizes the proximate relationship of things and ideas (the spider and her web, for example), on the other hand.

Later on, in an academic text, I encountered Arachne and her web again. If traditionally, Arachne's plight is highlighted only through an attention towards her product – the beauty of her web and its narrative content – literary theorist Nancy K. Miller's revisionary interpretation reinserts the problematic body of the weaver back into the disembodied textile web. '... Arachne's story,' Miller attests, '... is not only the tale of text as tissue: it evokes a bodily substance and a violence to the teller that is not adequately accounted for by an attention to a torn web'.²⁴ Miller reads Arachne as a

²² Byatt, 'Arachne', p.144.

²³ Byatt, 'Arachne', p.143.

²⁴ Miller, 'Arachnologies', p.82.

‘self-positioned feminist’ and stresses that in order to understand its content, we must read this web ‘topographically’²⁵ that is, to ground it to the specific position of its maker.²⁶ Proposing a method of reading that she calls ‘arachnology’, Miller emphasizes that we should not fixate on the representation of the web *per se* or pay attention to the spider as an isolated subject, but instead rematerialize the web as an interconnected, located and gendered production:

To remember Arachne only as the spider, or through the dangers of her web alone, is to retain the archetype and dismember, once again, with Athena, the subject of its history: to underread. The goal of overreading, ... is to put one’s finger – figuratively – on the place of production that marks the spinner’s attachment to her web. This is also, of course, to come closer to the spider’s art itself: in the end, the material of arachnologies may allow us to refuse and refigure the very opposition of subject and text, spider and web.²⁷

Thus, the spiderweb describes the relational and embodied structure of the intimate encounter. It reinserts the experiencing subject into the construction of her architectural subject matter. The web is also conceived as a critical feminine spatio-temporal figure that expresses architectural discourse as a complex, interwoven structure constituted by multiple times, spaces, subjects and experiences. It articulates the architectural subject of encounter as a web of changeable and contingent constellations.

²⁵ Miller, ‘Arachnologies’, p.78.

²⁶ Miller, ‘Arachnologies’, p.77.

²⁷ Miller, ‘Arachnologies’, pp.96-7.

The experiencing subject – like the spider who hooks onto particular points of the branch – encounters the architectural object and gravitates to specific points of this architectural object. Like the key positions of the branch onto which the spider clings, these ‘architectural hooks’ are neither imaginary nor arbitrary. They constitute significant points of the architectural object, from which creative conceptual threads – new architectural ideas and issues – can be woven. I suggest that it is through an intimate encounter of these points, what I call the intimate detail, that architectural meanings are constructed. The intimate detail will be discussed at length in the forthcoming section.

My use of the spiderweb to describe the shape of the intimate encounter and its enfolded experiencing subject, is akin to feminist philosopher Tamsin Lorraine’s ‘metaphor of the self as geographical terrain’.²⁸ Lorraine’s image of the self is materially grounded in the world and presented as a kind of mutually constitutive spatial assemblage:

A self, a conversation, a book, on this model can be seen as a configuration of random and aleatory elements converging to form *one location* with its own peculiar topology, strata and atmosphere. The contours of this self suggest a rich sense of connectedness, a kind of inevitable and mutually informing contact with surrounding terrain and the arbitrariness of staking out one’s boundaries. ... A self that becomes part of the terrain rather than acting upon it. ... an alternative to the model for self-presentation assumed in identity politics.²⁹

²⁸ Tamsin Lorraine, ‘Becoming Imperceptible as a Mode of Self-Presentation’, in Dorothea Olkowski (ed.), *Resistance, Flight, Creation: Feminist Enactments of French Philosophy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), pp.179-94; here p.185.

²⁹ Lorraine, ‘Becoming Imperceptible’, p.181. Emphasis mine.

Critically, Lorraine's epistemology of 'interconnected terrain' is informed by the Deleuzian notion of 'unjointed time', or a 'time-out-of-joint' which describes a creative synthesis of time privileging connections, transformations, and interventions.³⁰ In *Theoretical Contexts*, I discussed Julia Kristeva's 'women's time'. Kristeva's concept calls for a different spatio-temporal context that challenges historical time, which is seen by her as masculine and teleological. Here, following Kristeva's notion of a feminine time, I attempt to develop a spatio-temporal framework particular to the intimate encounter by drawing on Gilles Deleuze's concept of 'unjointed time'.

Appearing as a persistent theme in his work on cinema, his theses on difference as a new logic, and on sensation as an empirical and experimental category,³¹ Deleuze's 'time-out-of-joint' is an ahistorical concept insofar as it disobeys the representation of hierarchical, historical time. Instead, it conceptualizes time as a component that can be 'experimented' with. As philosopher John Rajchman explains, this experimental perspective suggests a rethinking of time as a "form of intuition" that makes possible the

³⁰ For interpretations of 'time-out-of-joint', see John Rajchman, *The Deleuze Connections* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2000), pp.4-13, pp.114-42; John Rajchman, *Constructions* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1997), pp.1-9; John Rajchman, 'Diagrams and Diagnosis', in Elizabeth Grosz (ed.), *Becomings: Explorations in Time, Memory, and Futures* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), pp.42-54; especially pp.45-5; Tamsin Lorraine, *Irigaray and Deleuze: Experiments in Visceral Philosophy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), pp.158-9; Tamsin Lorraine, 'Ahab and Becoming-Whale: The Nomadic Subject in Smooth Space', in Ian Buchanan and Gregg Lambert (eds.), *Deleuze and Space* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), pp.159-75; especially pp.170-4.

³¹ Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlison and Robert Galeta (London: Athlone Press, 1989); Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (London: Athlone Press, 1994); Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, trans. Mark Lester (London: Continuum, 2003).

“I think” rather than an attribute whose meaning and form is fixed by chronological representations.³²

The Deleuzian ‘experiment’ with time is an effort to free the concept of time from its normative representations and its ‘subordination to prior concept or discourse’.³³ Key to this idea is the belief that the ‘unfolding of life’ takes place through a ‘temporal indetermination’,³⁴ that is, life unfolds not through a hierarchy of linear or cyclical time, for example, but through a creative composition of juxtaposed spatio-temporalities³⁵ – a coming together of different spaces and times in a singular encounter, which Deleuze calls ‘virtualities’.³⁶ A ‘virtual’ space-time assemblage is ‘built from relations’ and alliances.³⁷ Rajchman describes the ‘virtual’ as ‘modes of arranging ... persons and things’ in possible configurations still ‘unseen in the present, to experiment with what may yet happen’.³⁸ This ‘time’ is conceptualized as the ‘indeterminate, complex time of the possible “compositions” of our lives: a time no longer contained within given movements, natural or celestial, always going “out-of-joint”’.³⁹

I find it significant that Deleuze’s own descriptions for this ‘unjointed time’, for example, as an assemblage, a composition, a synthesis, a construction or a montage,⁴⁰ are spatially

³² Rajchman, *The Deleuze Connections*, p.131. I find Rajchman’s interpretation of Deleuze’s ‘time-out-of-joint’ in an architectural context (see reference no.31) valuable to this discussion, and thus, expand his interpretation for my architectural argument.

³³ Rajchman, *The Deleuze Connections*, p.129.

³⁴ Rajchman, *The Deleuze Connections*, p.130.

³⁵ Rajchman, *The Deleuze Connections*, p.130.

³⁶ Rajchman, *Constructions*, pp.2-3.

³⁷ Rajchman, *Constructions*, p.3.

³⁸ Rajchman, *Constructions*, p.3.

³⁹ Rajchman, *Constructions*, p.3.

⁴⁰ Rajchman, *Constructions*, p.4.

suggestive. In Rajchman's architectural interpretation of 'time-out-of-joint', new spaces, questions and meanings that are 'singular and untimely', in the sense that they do not belong solely to one specific historical period, are released through the relation of bodies and objects.⁴¹ This 'architectural-time-out-of-joint', to adapt Deleuze's concept for architectural discourse, and to assert the centrality of space in the scheme, is the spiderweb's spatio-temporal context.

The spiderweb's 'architectural-time-out-of-joint' however, emphasizes the bodily engagement of the experiencing subject. In this sense, my 'architectural-time-out-of-joint' departs from Deleuze's disembodied model to align more closely with similarly radical but significantly embodied versions of feminist space-time concepts. These concepts are often creative and propositional rather than historically representative, for example, Rosi Braidotti's 'as if', Lucy Sargisson's 'utopia', Donna Haraway's 'scientific fiction', Susan Rubin Suleiman's 'the contemporary', Rendell's 'confessional constructions' and more recently, Beatriz Colomina's call for 'architectural fictions'.⁴² Finally, the complex configuration of overlapping times in one architectural space, is particularly clear in Grillner's composition of three historically divergent figures – herself and two eighteenth century garden theorists – conversing in Hagley Park of the present day.⁴³

⁴¹ Rajchman, *Constructions*, p.9.

⁴² Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), pp.1-8; Lucy Sargisson, *Contemporary Feminist Utopianism* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp.63-97; Donna Haraway, *Primate Visions: Gender, Race, and Nature in the World of Modern Science* (London: Verso, 1989), pp.3-5; Susan Rubin Suleiman, 'Introduction', pp.1-10; Jane Rendell, 'Writing in Place of Listening', in Sharon Kivland and Lesley Sanderson (eds.), *Transmission: Speaking and Listening* (vol.1) (Sheffield: Sheffield Hallam University, 2002), pp.15-29; Beatriz Colomina, 'Architecture Should Learn from Fiction', in *Archis*, v.20, n.1, p.75.

⁴³ Katja Grillner, *Ramble, Linger and Gaze – Dialogues From The Landscape Garden* (PhD dissertation, KTH, 2000).

In putting forth a spatio-temporal context that is ‘out-of-joint’ with architectural history, I advocate that historical representation is only one possible ‘composition’, which arises from the experiencing subject’s encounter with the architectural object, so that an account of a sequence of events set in the past is done with an eye on their relevance to the present architectural encounter, and not to corroborate in a historical argument *per se*. In a sense, the architecture of intimate encounter is more interested in the chaotic past (recall my interest in the creative disorder of the museum over the policed hierarchy of the archive) – focusing on its mistakes and slips, as possible passages for constructing architectural meanings particular to the present encounter. This stance addresses the possibility of bridging the disjuncture between architecture as it is encountered through a non-linear, spatio-temporally complex experience, and as it is seamlessly represented in historical architectural discourse.

The experiencing subject makes sense of these compositional webs by negotiating a relationship with the intimate detail, an element from which she creates architectural meanings and experiences that embellish and complicate what she already knows through conventional architectural discourse. It is to the intimate detail that the discussion now turns.

The Intimate Detail

Conventionally, the detail in architecture articulates the building in the most precise manner. Yet, the detail is also ‘fertile ... (a) place where both the construction and the

construing of architecture take place'.⁴⁴ In this vein, the intimate detail is a 'fertile' object, evocative of multiple spaces, subjects, experiences and meanings that escape conventional architectural analysis. The intimate detail is an element, which endears itself to the experiencing subject. Unlike the conventional detail, which constitutes a physical part of the building, the intimate detail is an object not habitually recognized by architectural discourse, nor is it part of the architectural form despite the significant role it plays in shaping the experiencing subject's architectural experience. The intimate detail is instead excessive, the surplus of building. It is not distinguished by its size (it could be big or small) but by the associative connections it evokes.

In thinking about the intimate detail, I find many parallels with literary theorist Roland Barthes's concept of the 'punctum' or the 'punctual detail'.⁴⁵ In a discussion about photographic images, Barthes suggests there are two elements in a photograph, through which meaning is invested. The first element, 'studium', connotes a cultural and/or political field. It captures the photographer's intentions and derives from established themes within social, historical, and ethical areas of knowledge, for example.⁴⁶ The 'studium' reflects a representation whose meaning is total, without duality, indirection or disturbance.⁴⁷ The second element, which interests Barthes more and is key to an understanding of the intimate detail proposed here, is the 'punctum'. Barthes describes the 'punctum' as a kind of unintentional detail, one in excess of the 'studium', which

⁴⁴ Mario Frascari, 'The Tell-The-Tale Detail', in *VLA*, (1987), n.7, p.36, cited by Cardinal-Pett, 'Detailing', p.90.

⁴⁵ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* (London: Vintage, 2000), pp.25-60.

⁴⁶ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, p.26, p.28.

⁴⁷ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, pp.40-1. Schor says that the 'studium' 'participates in the economy of meaning', that is, it works in the service of the message'. See Naomi Schor, *Reading in Detail: Aesthetics and the Feminine* (London: Methuen, 1987), p.91.

disrupts our interpretation of the image because it ‘punctuates’ the ‘studium’.⁴⁸ Unlike the ‘studium’, which encodes an unequivocal message, the ‘punctum’ is subversive because of its pensiveness – it makes the reader doubt, it provokes thinking.⁴⁹ The ‘punctum’ functions as ‘a supplement that is at once inevitable and delightful’, escaping the control of the photographer who cannot ‘*not* photograph the partial object at the same time as the total object’.⁵⁰

The second element will break (or puncture) the ‘studium’. This time it is not I who will seek it out (as I invest the field of the ‘studium’ with my sovereign consciousness), it is the element, which rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me. A Latin word exists to designate this wound, this prick, this mark made by a pointed instrument, the word suits me all the better in that it also refers to the notion of punctuation. ... ‘punctum’ is also: sting, speck, cut, little hole ...⁵¹

For Barthes, the ‘punctum’ is an element that has an embodied relation to the reader of the photograph – it is something that wounds, pricks, or stings her – and whose meanings unfold through her engagement with it. He reminds us of the reader’s role in giving

⁴⁸ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, p.26.

⁴⁹ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, p.38.

⁵⁰ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, p.47; see also Schor, *Reading in Detail*, p.90. The ‘punctum’ may be compared to Walter Benjamin’s ‘fragment’, which according to Ernst Bloch, was central to Benjamin’s interpretive vision: ‘... a unique gaze for the significant detail, for what lies alongside, for those fresh elements which, in thinking and in the world, arise from here, for the individual things which intrude in an unaccustomed and non-schematic way, things which do not fit in with the usual lot and therefore deserve particular, incisive attention. ... this sort of significant periphery, ... this sort of meaningful incidental sign’. See Ernst Bloch, ‘Recollections of Walter Benjamin’, in Gary Smith (ed.), *On Walter Benjamin: Critical Essays and Recollections* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1988), pp.338-45; here p.340, cited by Graeme Gilloch, *Myth and Metropolis: Walter Benjamin and the City* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996), pp.8-9.

⁵¹ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, p.26.

meaning to the ‘punctum’, by saying it is an element which is ‘added’ – that is, given significance by the reader’s close reading of it – but it is also not something which the reader makes up since the ‘punctum’ is always co-existent with the ‘studium’. ‘It is what I add to’, Barthes says, ‘... and *what is nonetheless already there*’.⁵² In addition, literary critics such as Naomi Schor and Trinh T. Minh-ha have registered Barthes’s emphasis on the reader’s desire as a ‘feminine’ method of interpretation.⁵³

Philosopher Jacques Derrida suggests that the ‘punctum’ acts contrapunctally to give the ‘studium’ a kind of ‘polyphonic rhythm’, that is, it introduces into the ‘studium’ other possible meanings through an inclusion of ‘the voice of the other’.⁵⁴ Its discursive formation constitutes a ‘blind field’,⁵⁵ that is to say the ‘punctum’s’ field of knowledge is not like the all-seeing historical field set up by the ‘studium’, for example. Hence, to engage with its latent meanings, the ‘punctum’ shifts the reader’s perceptions by referencing a ‘secondary, untimely object’, which ‘manages to half conceal, delay or distract’⁵⁶ one’s knowledge. Thus, Barthes’s ‘punctum’ is a surplus element, desirous to the reader of the photograph, which punctuates the symbolic realm of meaning and draws in, through associative modes of signification, meanings and subjects otherwise repressed by this symbolic context.

Barthes’s ‘punctum’ and by extension, the intimate detail suggested in this thesis, are akin to feminist architectural theorist and designer Diana Agrest’s description of a transitional

⁵² Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, p.55.

⁵³ Schor, *Reading in Detail*, pp.96-7; Trinh T. Minh-Ha, ‘The Plural Void: Barthes and Asia’, in Diana Knight (ed.), *Critical Essays on Roland Barthes* (New York: G. K. Hall & Co., 2000), pp.209-18.

⁵⁴ Jacques Derrida, ‘From “The Deaths of Roland Barthes”’, in Knight, *Critical Essays on Roland Barthes*, pp.129-137; here p130, p.131.

⁵⁵ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, p.57.

⁵⁶ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, p.41.

element, which she calls the 'shifter'.⁵⁷ The 'shifter' is a connective and associative element, which Agrest asserts, fundamentally structures architectural meaning and experience. She argues that the 'shifter' does not signify a finite meaning in itself but a close reading of the 'shifter' offers a dynamic architectural interpretation, which brings together the self-interest of the experiencing subject with the symbolic meanings pre-determined by a 'historiocultural' context:

... they (the shifters) are structures of transition, the probability of producing different readings; ... These connective, condensing structures are the key to understanding the complexity of the built environment as an infinite text. They are not concerned with signification but with the *linking of signifiers*. They are the key to an *intertext* where meanings are displaced, thereby forming a network where the subject of the reading, the laws of the unconscious, and the historiocultural determinants are articulated. The importance of this notion of the shifter is that it accounts for the process of configuration and for the *dynamic aspects of configuration*, rather than for objects and functions.⁵⁸

Here, Agrest emphasizes that architectural meaning-making is not just embedded in architectural form and function but contingent on a triadic relationship constituted by 'the subject of the reading' (the architectural object), 'the laws of the unconscious' (the semiotic impulse) and 'the historiocultural determinants' (the symbolic context).

⁵⁷ Diana Agrest, 'Design versus Non-Design', in K. Michael Hays (ed.) *Architecture: Theory Since 1968* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1998), pp.198-213; here p.210. Coincidentally, this early article by Agrest appeared around the time when Kristeva's text on the semiotic was first translated to English. Agrest's text was first presented in a conference in 1974, and published in *Oppositions* (Fall 1976), v.6.

⁵⁸ Agrest, 'Design Versus Non-Design', p.210. Emphasis mine.

In the context of the intimate encounter, I propose that the intimate detail is an architectural variation developed from the 'punctum', that is, an 'off-centred'⁵⁹ architectural detail, which is insignificant to, and neglected by architectural discourse itself, yet one that 'pricks' the experiencing subject, and 'overwhelms the entirety' of her interpretation of the architectural subject of encounter.⁶⁰ Through a close reading of the intimate detail, the experiencing subject acquaints herself with the architectural object through traditionally non-architectural evidence and modes of knowing, for example, through biographical details, stories, gossip and casual conversation.

Within the epistemological figure of the spiderweb, the intimate detail constitutes one of the key points of contact to the object of study that determines the shape of the web. Thus, the intimate detail shapes one's architectural experience, being as it were, a 'privileged point of contact' between the experiencing subject and the architectural object, 'the hook onto which' the experiencing subject 'may hitch her own fantasies fasten his own individual myths'.⁶¹ The intimate detail can suggest different, and sometimes contradictory, architectural meanings and contexts, which are not otherwise evident from an interpretation of the physical building itself, nor sufficiently addressed in architectural discourse. But how does the experiencing subject interpret the intimate detail?

⁵⁹ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, p.51.

⁶⁰ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, p.49, p.51.

⁶¹ Schor, *Reading in Detail*, p.96.

Metonymy and Metaphor

Barthes describes the associative process of knowing connected to the 'punctum' as an 'erotic' disclosure as opposed to a 'pornographic' revelation.⁶² In relation to this dilatory quality, he further asserts that the 'punctum' necessitates an interpretive process, which cannot be conducted through 'description which will always miss its point of effect',⁶³ nor by visual scrutiny alone but instead the reader should 'allow the detail to arise of its own accord into affective consciousness', keeping her eyes shut.⁶⁴ What Barthes recognizes is that the latent meanings of the 'punctum' is best accessed through a 'blind field', that is, preparing a ground for the unfolding of relationships outside of those already known to the reader, thus drawing out the 'whole life external'⁶⁵ to the 'punctum'. Significantly, he observes that the desirous 'punctum' 'has a power of expansion' which is 'often metonymic'.⁶⁶ It 'takes the spectator outside its frame... it is a kind of subtle *beyond* – as if the image launched desire beyond what it permits us to see...'.⁶⁷

Here, Barthes offers a key characteristic of the 'punctum', that is, its associative quality, which he has specified as 'metonymic'. However, I suggest that the associative connections triggered by the 'punctum' may vary depending on the nature of the 'punctum' itself. This is to say that the associative connections could take the form of either metonymy or metaphor, that is, the reader of the photograph, or as I contend, the experiencing subject of an architectural encounter, could be transported outside the

⁶² Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, p.59.

⁶³ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, p.53.

⁶⁴ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, p.55.

⁶⁵ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, p.57.

⁶⁶ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, p.45.

⁶⁷ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, p.59.

'punctum's' frame of reference through relationships of conceptual contiguity (metonymy) or conceptual similarity (metaphor), depending on what kind of object constitutes the 'punctum'. Thus, drawing from Barthes's observation that the 'punctum' has a metonymic 'power of expansion', I propose that the intimate detail, which is developed as an architectural variation of the 'punctum', may be critically interpreted through the associative processes of either metonymy or metaphor, depending on the nature of this intimate detail.

Metonymy, which 'exploits relationships of contiguity between things' and metaphor, which 'exploits relationships of similarity between things' are key hermeneutic strategies that reclaim and/or create surplus meanings repressed by a symbolic context.⁶⁸ Literary theorist Kaja Silverman reminds us that these two signifying tropes operate through 'the principle of absence', that is to say, they suggest that there is a missing or suppressed idea or thing, which is co-present but unrealized in a relationship.⁶⁹ Following Barthes's description of the 'punctum's' ability to evoke a 'subtle beyond', metonymy and metaphor generate unthinkable connections between previously unrelated objects, ideas and contexts. Feminist philosopher Lucy Sargisson suggests that these associative modes make us think creatively of what 'else' is possible:

... metaphor ... can give shape to the contents of *etc.* Like *etc.*, the metaphor invokes "something" else: a surplus. We must, says Ricoeur, recognize a 'truth' in the metaphor for it to 'work'. By suggesting alternative truths, realities and

⁶⁸ Kaja Silverman, *The Subject of Semiotics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp.110-11. See also Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor: The Creation of Meaning in Language*, trans. Robert Czerny (London: Routledge, 2003), pp.63-8.

⁶⁹ Silverman, *The Subject of Semiotics*, p.113.

values through metaphor and myth (and metonymy), ... (one) challenge(s) and create(s), by stimulating questions and perhaps discordance in the mind of the experiencing subject.⁷⁰

Metonymy and metaphor are also conceptualized as part of the psychoanalytic meaning-making apparatus. In a psychoanalytic context, these tropes are understood as 'signifying formations which facilitate a movement back and forth – a "transversality" – not only between the two elements they conjoin, but between the primary and secondary processes, the unconscious and the preconscious'.⁷¹ The primary and secondary processes are signifying procedures that occur in the unconscious and the collective preconscious, respectively. Primary processes of signification involve the psychoanalytic notions of condensation and displacement, which are unconscious processes that manipulate the latent and manifest contents of dreams. Secondary processes revolve around paradigm and syntagm, which are established ideas and meanings regulated by cultural norms and symbolic laws.⁷² The unconscious-preconscious/primary process-secondary process relationships correspond to the semiotic-symbolic pairing. Silverman emphasizes that meaning-making happens through an 'intricate collaboration between primary and secondary processes',⁷³ a link which is facilitated by metonymy and metaphor since these processes occupy a mediating position between the individual's unconscious and the cultural preconscious.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ Sargisson, *Contemporary Feminist Utopianism*, p.219.

⁷¹ Silverman, *The Subject of Semiotics*, p.110.

⁷² Silverman, *The Subject of Semiotics*, pp.66-76 (on the primary and secondary processes); pp.89-101 (for condensation and displacement); pp.102-8 (for paradigm and syntagm).

⁷³ Silverman, *The Subject of Semiotics*, p.84.

⁷⁴ Silverman, *The Subject of Semiotics*, p.86.

The use of associative interpretive methods – metaphor, or metonymy, or both – is widespread amongst feminist thinkers. While the Aristotelian notion of metaphor is strictly concerned with replacing one thing or idea with another thing or idea to which the former shares a resemblance,⁷⁵ this model has been criticized because it retains a hierarchical and oppositional relationship between things and ideas, as well as privileging sameness rather than difference between them. Instead, feminist thinkers have begun to redefine metaphor as a way of challenging hierarchy and opposition.

For example, philosopher Gemma Corradi Fiumara points out that the multiple and imaginative features contained within metaphoric associations including ‘transference, transport, transgression, alienation, impropriety, identity, linkage, mediation, exile, evasion, transformation, deviation, (and) conjunction’,⁷⁶ enable meanings and ideas to develop beyond known relations already coded in the symbolic order. Sargisson similarly argues for the usage of metaphor to evoke ‘unrepresentable differences’, that is, to suggest a tension between what ‘is’ and what ‘is not’ present, and to give shape to the contents of the ‘etc’, the ‘something else’ or the ‘surplus’, which escapes representation.⁷⁷ Rather than thinking of metaphor as a relationship of resemblance between two things or ideas in which one is dominant and replaces the other, feminist philosopher Elaine Miller argues that metaphor can be conceptualized as ‘an intertwining that reads two things in

⁷⁵ Gemma Corradi Fiumara, ‘The Metaphoric Function and the Question of Objectivity’, in Kathleen Lennon and Margaret Whitford (eds.), *Knowing the Epistemological Difference: Feminist Perspectives in Epistemology* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp.31-44; here p.36-7; Elaine P. Miller, *The Vegetative Soul: From Philosophy of Nature to Subjectivity in the Feminine* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), pp.187-8.

⁷⁶ Fiumara, ‘The Metaphoric Function’, p.36.

⁷⁷ Sargisson, *Feminist Utopianism*, p.219.

terms of one another in such a way that no priority can be drawn, no implication that one figure represents, or stands in for, the other'.⁷⁸

In architectural discourse, Bloomer stresses the importance of an 'extra-architectural' language that will describe 'the space between, the connections among ...'.⁷⁹ It is vital to emphasize that metaphor in an architectural proposition is different from metaphor in literature because the former strives to act on the abstract and to suggest multiple possibilities, while simultaneously promising a kind of grounded-ness, of being 'habitable' at the same time.⁸⁰ This duality may be what Bloomer alludes to as she reiterates the need for 'the *generative use* of more complex and matter-friendly tropes than metaphor ... to open ... up to multiple possibilities of signification that are generative and regenerative and that create complex *constructions* connecting architecture to the world'.⁸¹ Thus, while I retain the term 'metaphor' in this thesis, it is Bloomer's and the feminists' redefined notion of a deconstructive and regenerative metaphorical trope, which interests me, that is to say, the metaphorical relationships explored in this thesis attempt to reclaim previously repressed things, subjects and/or ideas, and to emphasize the intertwined connection between what is already known and what has been repressed.

Metonymy on the other hand, is less prevalent in use than metaphor but it has been appropriated by philosopher Luce Irigaray, in particular, as an alternative feminine

⁷⁸ Miller, *The Vegetative Soul*, p.187; see also Claudette Sartillot, *Herbarium Verbarium: The Discourse of Flowers* (Lincoln: The University of Nebraska Press, 1993), p.45.

⁷⁹ Jennifer Bloomer, 'Nature Morte', in Francesca Hughes (ed.), *The Architect Reconstructing Her Practice* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1996), pp.236-50; here p.247.

⁸⁰ For the critical use of metaphor in architectural discourse in discussing architectural design, see Agrest, 'Design versus Non-Design', pp.198-213.

⁸¹ Bloomer, 'Nature Morte', p.245. Emphasis mine.

mode of thinking.⁸² Irigaray argues that metaphor retains a phallogocentric structure of vertical substitution and repression, which she aligns with ‘solids’, while metonymy expresses a more ‘fluid’ relationship between things and ideas, and thus, lends itself as a critical tool not merely for revealing and dismantling these feminine repressions but also for engaging and displacing them creatively, in order to create new forms of interrelatedness and new modes of knowing.⁸³

While metaphor emphasizes conceptual similarity, metonymy exploits relationships of difference, contiguity and connection between normally irreconcilable ideas and things. In Irigaray’s scheme, metonymy is a feminine mode of association, which displaces and restructures male metaphors that describe femininity as a passive condition.⁸⁴ Irigaray culls new feminine thought images from surplus meanings generated through metaphor in order to challenge dominant relationships and meanings privileged in the symbolic context.⁸⁵ For example, Miller points out that Irigaray’s metonymic concept of ‘horizontal efflorescence’⁸⁶ derives from, and critiques, the male metaphor of ‘woman as plant’.⁸⁷ This metonymic concept creatively engages a previously passive metaphorical association to generate a new subversive feminine thought image, which restructures phallogocentric views of femininity. Feminist philosopher Margaret Whitford points out

⁸² For interpretations on Irigaray’s use of metonymy, see Miller, *The Vegetative Soul*, pp.188-200; Margaret Whitford, *Luce Irigaray: Philosophy in the Feminine* (London: Routledge, 1991), pp.71-3, pp.170-91. For Irigaray’s introduction of feminine epistemological structures, namely ‘horizontal efflorescence’ and ‘fluids’, see respectively, Luce Irigaray, *The Forgetting of Air in Martin Heidegger*, trans. Mary Beth Mader (London: Athlone Press, 1999), pp.105-20; Luce Irigaray, ‘The “Mechanics” of Fluids’, in *This Sex Which is Not One* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), pp.106-18.

⁸³ Irigaray, ‘The “Mechanics” of Fluids’, pp.109-10; Miller, *The Vegetative Soul*, p.192, p.194.

⁸⁴ Miller, *The Vegetative Soul*, p.195.

⁸⁵ Miller, *The Vegetative Soul*, p.195.

⁸⁶ Irigaray, *The Forgetting of Air*, p.106.

⁸⁷ Miller, *The Vegetative Soul*, p.197.

that Irigaray's use of metonymy is not just a stylistic practice but fundamental to the restructuring of the imaginary realm where femininity is a repressed category perpetuated by phallogocentric metaphors.⁸⁸ For example, through the 'rhizomatic displacement of metonymy',⁸⁹ Irigaray transforms patriarchal symbols of femininity ('woman as plant') into subversive critiques of masculine epistemology, and draws on alternative, and often subversive, meanings in the use of language to radically alter the passive status of women in the symbolic context, of society and the law.⁹⁰

However, the most distinctive metonymic structure is arguably Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's notion of the 'rhizome', which suggests a web resembling a horizontally spreading root system.⁹¹ In describing the construction of the rhizomatic web as a process moved by 'desire',⁹² Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome articulates a map of connections, which take the form of 'an explosion of two heterogeneous series in a line of flight',⁹³ that is to say, the connection is both contingent and unstable so that this web is continually subject to new formations.

It is worth mentioning that Deleuze and Guattari militate against the psychoanalytic application of 'metonymy' (and 'metaphor') as they distrust the ability of these rhetorical tropes to generate new concepts beyond meanings predetermined by the familial, hierarchical and patriarchal model of the unconscious outlined by Freudian

⁸⁸ Whitford, *Luce Irigaray*, pp.71-3; p.89, pp.170-77.

⁸⁹ Miller, *The Vegetative Soul*, p.195.

⁹⁰ For Irigaray's revisionist concept of 'exchange', for example, see Whitford, *Luce Irigaray*, pp.177-91.

⁹¹ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, 'Introduction: Rhizome', in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (London: Athlone Press, 1999), pp.3-25.

⁹² Deleuze and Guattari, 'Introduction', p.14.

⁹³ Deleuze and Guattari, 'Introduction', p.10.

psychoanalysis.⁹⁴ However, my reading of the rhizome as ‘metonymic’ is not based on the Freudian familial model. Instead, the rhizomatic structure as it is used here articulates a creative web of spaces, times and subjects, which are not normally related to each other but critically intertwined through a shared context, for example in this thesis, through Maugham as the hotel’s occupant and through the intrusion of wild animals into the Billiard Room.

An interpretation of the ‘architectural subject’ through the intimate detail requires an engagement with metaphor and metonymy. These associative modes of interpretation have a two-fold purpose. First, they interrogate the architectural object, both through analytical and speculative means, for surplus meanings, subjects and/or experiences, which may be suppressed by conventional architectural discourse. Second, and following the first point, the production of associative meanings by the experiencing subject complicates and multiplies an architect-centred architectural account.

The intimate detail punctuates the symbolic context of architectural discourse to hint at a specific configuration, that is, a web of spaces, subjects and themes, which escape this symbolic context. This web is constituted as a contingent and shifting configuration that necessarily takes into account not just the architectural object itself and its established meanings but also the experiencing subject’s architectural encounter. In extending the conceptual notions of Barthes’ ‘punctum’ and Agrest’s ‘shifter’, I propose here that the associative interpretation of the intimate detail is dependent on two aspects, that is, first, as suggested earlier, on the nature of the intimate detail itself, and second, on the

⁹⁴ Deleuze and Guattari, ‘Introduction’, pp.13-18.

architectural space in which this detail is located. In this thesis, the intimate details are sited in a colonial hotel.

The concluding section of this chapter explores how the intimate detail unfolds through metonymy and metaphor in relation to the spaces of the Raffles Hotel, that is how these associative interpretations are specifically played out through what I call the hotel's floral and animal 'plots'.

'Plots' and Hotels: Plotting the Raffles Hotel Through Flora and Fauna

Significantly, the hotel as architectural type has been linked to the notion of 'plot' by Rem Koolhaas, Douglas Tallack, James Clifford and Sigfried Kracauer. In their texts, the architectural space of the hotel is re-ordered through a new spatio-temporal framework. According to Koolhaas, the hotel's spatial formation is decipherable only by examining a series of heterogeneous and mainly non-architectural traces. He observes that not only did the hotel become Hollywood's favourite subject in the 1930s but it also 'frames all stories and lends them coherence', thus relieving 'the scriptwriter of the obligation of inventing a plot'.⁹⁵ Elsewhere, Tallack and Kracauer see the hotel as a space of dissimulation associated with the structure of the detective novel. '... (The hotel) is a space', Tallack tells us, 'which *takes place* in narratives'.⁹⁶ For him, it is a space where

⁹⁵ Rem Koolhaas, *Delirious New York: A Retroactive Manifesto for Manhattan* (New York: Monacelli Press, 1994), pp.148-9. I am grateful to Barbara Penner for bringing this text to my attention.

⁹⁶ Douglas Tallack, "'Waiting, Waiting": The Hotel Lobby, in the Modern City', in Neil Leach (ed.) *The Hieroglyphics of Space: Reading and Experiencing the Modern Metropolis* (London: Routledge, 2002), pp.139-51; here

waiting, watching and being watched ‘stimulates a hermeneutics of suspicion, a preoccupation with the visual signs or clues which turn banality into intrigue, routine into plot’.⁹⁷ Clifford similarly describes the hotel as a chronotope, that is, ‘a setting or scene organizing time and space in representable whole form’.⁹⁸ His examples of such ‘settings’ include the postmodern hotels described by Frederic Jameson, V.S. Naipaul’s literary invention of exilic hotels, and the fictional hotels captured in artist Joseph Cornell’s treasure boxes.⁹⁹

According to literary theorist Peter Brooks, ‘Plot ... is not a matter of typology or of fixed structures, but rather a structuring operation’, and it considers ‘both story elements and their ordering’.¹⁰⁰ Brooks extracts and links four categories giving the meaning of ‘plot’:

- 1(a) A small piece of ground, generally used for a specific purpose.
- (b) A measured area of land; lot.
- 2 A ground plan, as for a building chart; diagram.
- 3 The series of events consisting of an outline of the action of narrative or drama
- 4 A secret plan to accomplish a hostile or illegal purpose; scheme

There may be a subterranean logic connecting these heterogeneous meanings.

Common to the original sense of the word is the idea of boundedness,

p.141; Siegfried Kracauer, ‘The Hotel Lobby’, in *The Mass Ornament*, trans. Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1995), pp.173-85.

⁹⁷ Tallack, ‘Waiting, Waiting’, p.146.

⁹⁸ James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1997), p.25.

⁹⁹ Clifford, *Routes*, pp.17-18, p.31.

¹⁰⁰ Peter Brooks, ‘Reading for the Plot’, in Martin Mcquillan (ed.), *The Narrative Reader* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp.145-52; here p.145, p.147.

demarcation, the drawing of lines to mark off and order. This easily extends to the chart or diagram of the demarcated area, which in turn modulates to the outline of the literary work. From the organized space, plot becomes the organizing line, demarcating and diagramming that which was previously undifferentiated. We might think here of the geometrical expression, plotting points, or curves, on a graph by means of coordinates, as a way of locating something, perhaps oneself. The fourth sense of the word, the scheme or conspiracy, seems to have come into English through the contaminating influence of the French *complot* ... the organizing line of plot is more often than not some scheme of machination, a concerted plan for the accomplishment of some purpose which goes against the ostensible and dominant legalities ... the realization of a blocked and resisted desire. Plots are not simply organizing structures, they are also intentional structures, goal-oriented and forward-moving.¹⁰¹

Brooks expands the meanings of 'plot', shifting from one of certainty and boundedness, to one of elusiveness and stealth, from limited object to expansive structure. To plot is to move from something defined towards a surplus, and to realize a 'blocked or resisted desire'. By extension, to think of the hotel through 'plot' is to re-conceptualize an indisputable and bounded typological form as an expansive subject of intimate encounter. Thus, 'plot' as it is used in this thesis, refers in particular to the intimate encounter taking place in the space of the hotel, and describes the experiencing subject's critical re-ordering of the hotel's architectural space and time, following metonymic and metaphorical interpretations of the intimate detail. I will argue that the Raffles Hotel's

¹⁰¹ Brooks, *'Reading for the Plot'*, pp.146-7.

'plots' critically operate through metonymy and metaphor to reveal a web of subjects, spaces, meanings and experiences, which have been neglected by the hotel's emergent architectural history, especially the architectural narrative of the National Monument, which was discussed in *Empirical Contexts*.

The Raffles Hotel is an architectural space synonymous with two significant associations. The first occurs in the Palm Court, a rectangular lawn planted with palm trees particularly famous for its connections to the English novelist W. Somerset Maugham, who reputedly spent time writing novels in this garden.¹⁰² The second unfolds in the Billiard Room, a purpose-built pavilion renowned for its links to several wild animals, which took refuge in this space, and stirred up much fanfare and public interest.¹⁰³ The Palm Court and the Billiard Room are amongst the hotel's key spaces. Thus, it is particularly significant that it is through these conventionally non-architectural 'facts' that the experiencing subject first encounters these spaces. These 'facts' are familiar to the hotel's staff,¹⁰⁴ circulated in the hotel's commissioned monographs, appear as stories,

¹⁰² Gretchen Liu, *Raffles Hotel* (Singapore: Editions Didier Millet, 2006), p.91; Raymond Flower, *Year of the Tiger* (Singapore: Times Books International, 1986), p.13, p.23-8; Raymond Flower, 'The Palm Courts of Maugham and Coward', in *Raffles: The Story of Singapore* (Beckenham: Croon Helm, 1984), pp.161-4; Roberto Pregarz, 'Somerset Maugham Another Story' and 'Raffles Writers', in *Memories of Raffles: 22 Years With a Grand Old Hotel* (Singapore: Treasury Publishing, 1990), pp.52-7, pp.74-83; Ilsa Sharp, *There is Only One Raffles: The Story of a Grand Hotel* (London: Souvenir Press, 1981), pp.105-8.

¹⁰³ Liu, *Raffles Hotel*, pp.66-7; Pregarz, 'Tigers in the Tiffin Room', in *Memories of Raffles*, pp.42-7; Flower, *Raffles*, p.71; Flower, *Year of the Tiger*, pp.20-1; Sharp, *There is Only One Raffles*, pp.35-7; 'A Tiger in Town: Shot at Raffles Hotel Under the Billiard Room', in *The Straits Times*, 13 August 1902; 'Python at Raffles: The Famous Tiger Hunt Recalled by a Snake Capture', in *The Straits Times*, 10 January 1903; 'Boar Hunt at Raffles: Another Wild *Shikar* on the Hotel Verandah', in *The Straits Times*, 27 February 1903; 'Great Hunt at Raffles: Terrible Struggle Between the Fat *Jagah* and a Fatter Pig', in *The Straits Times*, 6 September 1904.

¹⁰⁴ In the hotel's private holdings, there is a file recording a select list of 'historical facts' which constitutes key information to be mastered by the staff. Two important items on this list are Maugham in the Palm Court and the tiger in the Billiard Room.

illustrated humour, mentioned in contemporary travel advice,¹⁰⁵ and supported by exhibits in the hotel's in-house museum. For example, a letter from Maugham to the hotel permitting the use of his phrase 'Raffles, for the fables of the Exotic East', first edition copies of his fiction, an autographed photograph of the writer, newspaper clippings detailing the animal visits and cartoons are exhibited in this museum. However, these anecdotal 'facts' are notably absent from the hotel's emergent architectural history and divorced from the archive of architectural drawings kept in the National Archives.¹⁰⁶

I am interested in the formation of this architectural subject through these two sets of 'facts'. I wish to understand how the experiencing subject's intimate encounter with the floral and animal plots, that is, her understanding of the hotel through alternative evidence related to Maugham in the Palm Court and the animals in the Billiard Room might transform the architectural account, and to what extent this account resembles or departs from the hotel's emergent architectural history as a National Monument

¹⁰⁵ For example, a web search on Google conducted on 18 April 2006 with the keywords 'Maugham' and 'Palm' and 'Court' and 'Raffles' yielded 534 results. This includes a mention of Maugham in the hotel's own website, see <http://www.raffles.com/legend/chronology.php>; and other independent travel websites, see for example: <http://www.expedia.co.uk/daily/wg/P72516.asp?CCheck=1&> and http://www.concorde-travel.com/CW/CW_SINGAPORE.htm (Accessed on 18 April 2006).

Examples of travel guides to Singapore linking Maugham to the hotel include: *The Rough Guide to Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei* (London: Rough Guides, 2003), pp.637-8; *CityPack: Singapore* (Basingstoke, UK: AA Publishing, 2006), p.26; *Globetrotter: Singapore* (London: New Holland Publishers, 2005), p.45; *Lonely Planet: Best of Singapore* (Melbourne: Lonely Planet Publications, 2004), p.17; *The Rough Guide to Singapore* (London: Rough Guides, 2003), p.47; *Insight Pocket Guide Singapore* (Singapore: APA Publications, 2005), p.33; *D. K. Eyewitness Travel Guides: Singapore* (Singapore: Editions Didier Millet, 2003), p.50. Notably D. K. Eyewitness devotes a two-page axonometric spread to the architecture of the Raffles Hotel, the only building featured in detail in this travel guide. See *D. K. Eyewitness*, pp.50-1.

¹⁰⁶ For account of the hotel's emergent architectural history, the architectural holdings of the National Archives related to the hotel, and the hotel's status as a National Monument, see *Empirical Contexts*, pp.99-109.

Not coincidentally, these floral and animal ‘facts’ are also culled from the hotel’s tropical image. However, as I previously argued, ‘the tropical’ is a term that can take on many meanings.¹⁰⁷ Thus, this thesis interprets the floral and animal plots of the Raffles Hotel for their hermeneutic density, that is, for surplus meanings and experiences beyond what is signified by the emergent architectural histories of this National Monument.

The architectural interpretations of the Palm Court and the Billiard Room are conducted through the feminized representations of tropical flora and fauna, which are juxtaposed against the patriarchal, masculine image of the hotel associated with Maugham and the colonial hunter. Through a close reading of these floral and animal connections, the thesis fleshes out the colonial hotel’s simultaneous dependence on and suppression of a feminine imaginary. In relation to each space, an intimate detail, a tell-tale clue that reveals how meaning may be constructed through the intimate encounter, is examined. At the Palm Court, the intimate detail is manifest in the palm tree – an object which takes on multiple and imaginative contexts similar to those described in Maugham’s fictional landscapes; while in the Billiard Room, the intimate detail is the billiard table – an artifact embroiled in several fantastic accounts of where the tiger was actually hiding and killed.

Subsequently, the Palm Court is explored through the floral plot of ‘grafting’, an architectural concept which alludes to the botanical process of transplanting new hybrids but more particularly to the fertile associations that exist between tropical flora and a web of feminine spaces. Through ‘grafting’, the thesis explores a new metonymic

¹⁰⁷ For my argument of the hermeneutic possibilities of ‘the tropical’, see *Empirical Contexts*, pp.116-9.

typology for the Palm Court, driven by its connection to Maugham. This radical typology constitutes a rhizomatic web of grafted feminized spaces, which I propose, associatively constructs the experience of Maugham's Palm Court.

The Billiard Room, on the other hand, is investigated through the animal plot of 'overturning', an architectural concept derived from the mistaken rumour that there was a tiger under the billiard table (the tiger was under the billiard room). The term 'overturning' is informed by the criticality of being 'under the table', or of 'turning the tables on someone', which suggest a subversive action. 'Overturning' interprets the Billiard Room through the metaphorical associations of the 'animal', which includes a propensity for animal anecdotes, children's stories featuring animals, the presence of grotesque bodies and the surfacing of a repressed feminine. These repressed metaphorical animal associations overturn the conventional architectural meanings and hierarchical relationships associated with the Billiard Room, which is concerned with the image of the masculine colonial body, and definitive architectural facts and history associated with a National Monument. The repressed animal metaphors reveal the intertwined relationship with, and the foundational role of, these repressed subjects in the Billiard Room's masculine, colonial and historical representations.

Through the intimate encounter, the existing interpretations of these two spaces – the Palm Court as neutral and the Billiard Room as masculine – are undermined. Instead, the repressed feminine foundations, which are denied by the hotel's emergent architectural history and masked in its monumentalization, are gradually teased out.

The choice of two time frames, 1887-1925 and 1987-2005, is consistent with the appointed spatio-temporal context of the intimate encounter, which operates in a ‘time-out-of-joint’. The first period relates to the historical contexts of Maugham in the Palm Court and the animals in the Billiard Room. The second period relates to the contemporary context of this experiencing subject and her intimate encounter with the architectural object. The second phase also coincides with the designation of the hotel as a National Monument, which ultimately raised the stakes concerning how the hotel should be documented and represented.

As the Palm Court and the Billiard Room are closely intertwined with Maugham and the animals respectively, this experiencing subject’s contemporary intimate encounter with these spaces reflects a necessarily non-linear spatio-temporal context – one in which different times (Maugham’s, the animals’, the experiencing subject’s and the building’s) converge in these spaces. This dissertation does not aim to present an exhaustive architectural history of the Palm Court and the Billiard Room; instead, the two following sections – *Flora* (Part Two) and *Fauna* (Part Three) – are discursive webs produced out of an intimate encounter with these spaces.

Flora and *Fauna* each comprise two types of texts – an extensive academic argument and a shorter performative ‘text’, which is thematically related to the academic argument. I call the shorter performative ‘text’ ‘spider-writing’, which is a term that best reflects a semiotic investment in the experiencing subject’s architectural interpretation.

‘Spider-writing’ is inspired by my interest in the performative architectural texts by Rendell, Bermann, Bloomer and Grillner. Not surprisingly, these texts are constructed

by women who, as Miller argues, usually have a different relationship to institution, authority and identity:

... women have not had the same historical relation of identity to origin, institution, production ... (thus) her relation to integrity and textuality, desire and authority, displays structurally important differences from that universal position.¹⁰⁶

In this thesis, 'spider-writing' involves the production of performative 'texts' creatively articulated through words, as well as through the production of inventive objects. These 'spider-writings' express a kind of restlessness with normative architectural representation by forefronting the relationship between the experiencing subject and her architectural object of study. The 'spider-writings' of *Flora* and *Fauna* take on a different relationship to the academic argument in each section. *Flora* opens with an invented archive of pressed paper flower and leaves imprinted with Maugham's fiction, and ends with a set of love letters, which becomes one of the final threads in the metonymic web of the Palm Court. In *Fauna*, a collection of miniature tables, whose function and meaning as architectural models are contested, act as a preamble to the architectural interpretation of the Billiard Room, and the section closes with a watchman's memoirs of animals in the Billiard Room. The 'spider-writings' of the Palm Court and the Billiard Room map speculative critical routes into these architectural spaces.

To recapitulate, in this chapter I argued for, and developed a new theoretical method for architectural discourse by proposing an architectural intimate encounter. I outlined

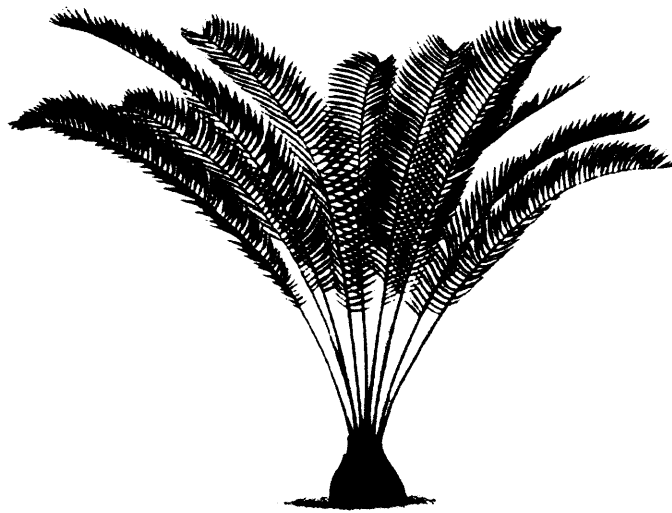
¹⁰⁶ Miller, 'Changing the Subject', p.106.

three key aspects of the intimate encounter: the relational experiencing subject, her spatio-temporal spiderweb, and the intimate detail. Through the figure of the spiderweb, I emphasized that the intimate encounter necessarily embeds a spatio-temporal context of multiple times, spaces and subjects, and that the 'architectural subject' is constituted as a 'double subject' involving both the architectural object and the experiencing subject. I discussed how the intimate detail prompts an interpretation of the architectural object through metonymy and metaphor.

In the concluding section, I provided a summary of how this method operates in this thesis, and introduced the notion of 'plot' in relation to an intimate encounter of the hotel. 'Plot' is defined as a critical restructuring of architectural space and time through architectural concepts, which are derived from a close reading of the intimate detail. Through 'plot', the hotel is re-conceptualized as a web of spaces, times and subjects central to this experiencing subject's intimate encounter but are neglected in the hotel's emergent architectural history as a National Monument. Hence, it is through the hotel's floral and animal plots that an architecture of intimate encounter, now unfolds.

Part TWO

Flora



The Floral Press

In this work, I explore the relationship between W. Somerset Maugham and the Palm Court of the Raffles Hotel through an invented archive of paper flower and leaves.

These floral artifacts are copies of five tropical plant varieties grown in the Palm Court. Each flower or leaf is imprinted with textual excerpts drawn from Maugham's 'exotic fiction', specifically his Malayan stories, which are sited around the Malayan peninsula, Singapore, Borneo and much of the Dutch Indies.¹ In these excerpts, Maugham depicts the tropical landscape, the East and the feminine figure as interchangeable constructs. Each is seen as fertile, alluring, and ultimately, dangerous.

The placement of Maugham's text against the Palm Court's flora suggests a reciprocal reading of the Palm Court and Maugham's 'exotic fiction', that is, the possibility of reading one through the other. For me, what seems fascinating is that gender terms are not always as distinctly oppositional as one might imagine for a colonial figure like Maugham. The notion of the colonial heterosexual masculine figure colonizing a passive feminine space of the East is undermined by Maugham's fiction and his self. For one thing, in Maugham's fiction, the feminine East is not always a passive environment. For another thing, as a closet homosexual himself, Maugham bent predetermined gendered positions.

I am interested in the gendering of the Palm Court through Maugham's fiction and his occupation of this space. Thus, the floral press – 'press' refers to both the female pastime of pressing flowers and leaves, and Maugham's prolific textual production of the 'Exotic East' marked by florid landscapes and *femme fatales* – raises this question:

What kind of femininity is suggested of the Palm Court through its relationship with Maugham?

¹ The Malayan peninsula comprised the Federated and Unfederated Malay States, and the Straits Settlement (Malacca, Penang and Singapore).

2.1.1b

Alpinia Purpurata

(Red Ginger)

The Narrow Corner, W. Somerset Maugham³



³ W. Somerset Maugham, *The Narrow Corner* (London: Heinemann, 1979), p.34.

2.1.1c

Nephrolepis Exaltata

(Sword Fern)

Neil MacAdam, W. Somerset Maugham⁴

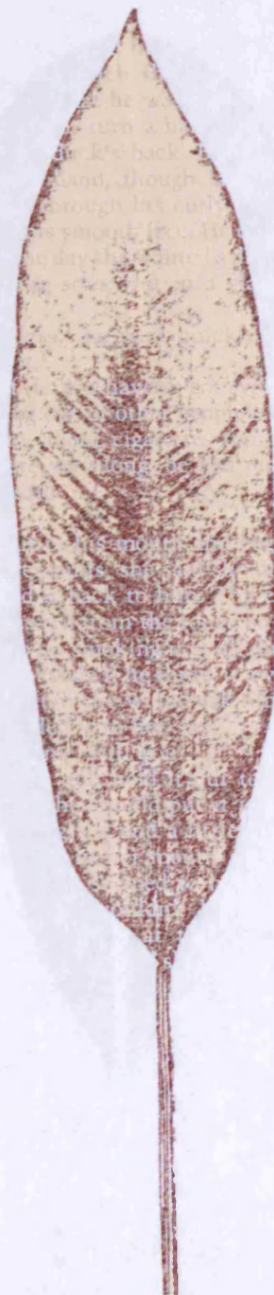


⁴ W. Somerset Maugham, 'Neil MacAdam', in *Far Eastern Tales* (London: Vintage, 2000), pp.184-239; here p.202.

2.1.1d

Heliconia sp.
(Lobster-claw)

Neil MacAdam, W. Somerset Maugham⁵

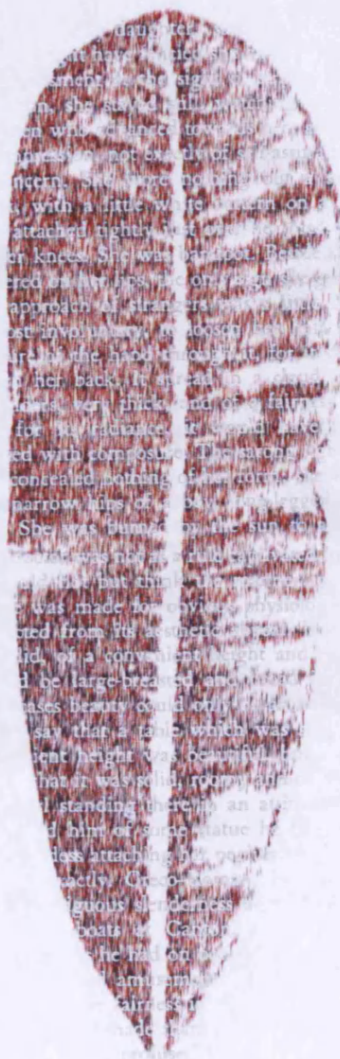


⁵ Maugham, 'Neil MacAdam', in *Far Eastern Tale*, p.202.

2.1.1e

Plumeria 'Rubra'

(Frangipani)

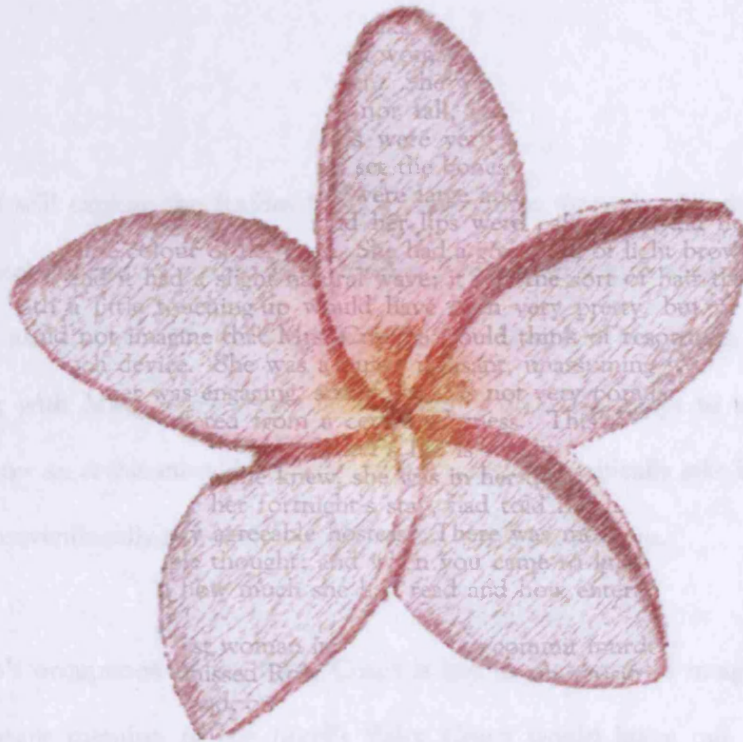
The Narrow Corner, W. Somerset Maugham⁶

⁶ Maugham, *The Narrow Corner*, pp.134-5.

2.1.1f

Plumeria 'Rubra' - Flower

(Frangipani)

The Letter, W. Somerset Maugham⁷

⁷ W. Somerset Maugham, 'The Letter', in *The Complete Short Stories of W. Somerset Maugham* Vol.III (London: Heinemann, 1952), pp.1413-45; here p.1418.

flora

1

Encountering the Palm Court through Maugham

In *Flora*, I will explore the Raffles Hotel's Palm Court through an intimate encounter with its most famous occupant. In particular, I engage its significant but architecturally neglected association with the English writer W. Somerset Maugham. Through my encounter with Maugham's traces in the Palm Court, I attempt to understand and theorize how an architectural knowledge of this space may critically take into account the garden's conventionally non-architectural evidence and associations.

Maugham's occupation of the Palm Court is key to the garden's image. Hardly any contemporary mention of the hotel's Palm Court would leave out Maugham, for example, 'Legend has it that Somerset Maugham would work all morning under a frangipani tree in the Palm Court of the famed Raffles Hotel ... turning bits of gossip and scandal overheard at dinner parties into famous stories';¹ or 'Maugham found the Raffles good for writing as well – though how he could sit out in the Palm Court, in the sun, morning after sweltering morning, and knock off even a Malayan short story about the usual desperate planters and secretly impassioned wives, ... is hard to imagine'.² In a recent online edition of the Telegraph, the journalist mentioned that the Palm Court was

¹ Sonia Kolesnikov-Jessop, 'New Owners for Singapore's Raffles Hotel', in *International Herald Tribune*, 19 July 2005.

² Colin Campbell, 'Singapore Sling is Spoken Here', in *The New York Times*, 12 December 1982.

synonymous with Maugham, and quoted the president of the Singapore Heritage Society who claimed that the hotel's link to Maugham had 'seeped into the consciousness of an international audience'.³ This claim is not entirely exaggerated. The association between this writer and this garden has been the subject of independent research, memoirs and a point highlighted in contemporary travel guides.⁴

Inevitably, commissioned monographs and private accounts of the hotel devote a space to the writer's stay in the hotel, his writing habits in the Palm Court, and the famous dictum he left to the hotel, which claims that the Raffles stands 'for all the fables of the Exotic East'.⁵ Traces of Maugham's connection to this garden are physically prevalent in the hotel's building fabric and in its choice of artifacts. His name is featured in a plaque at the Writer's Bar, which is adjacent to the Palm Court, and Suite No.102 in the Palm Court Wing, the Somerset Maugham Suite, is named and furnished after the writer. In the hotel's recent commissioned monograph authored by its museum's curator

³ Sebastien Berger, '£600m sale ruffles the famed calm of Raffles', in *Telegraph.co.uk*, 23 July 2005, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2005/07/23/wwide23.xml> (Accessed on 15 May 2006).

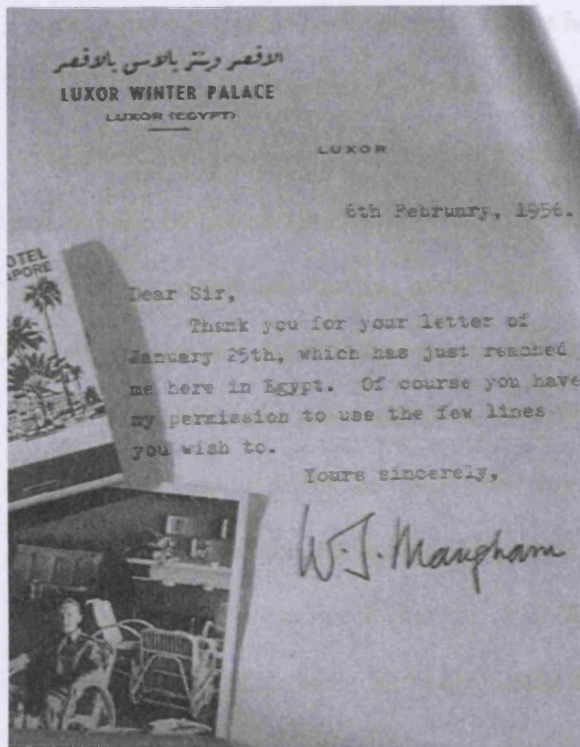
⁴ References linking Maugham, the Raffles Hotel and the Palm Court include contemporary travel guides (for examples of these, see *An Architecture of Intimate Encounter*, p.155); independent research and memoirs: Rebecca Lee and Andreas Augustin, *Secrets of an Old Lady: The Raffles Treasury* (Singapore: Treasury Publishing, 1988), p.18; Raymond Flower, 'The Palm Courts of Maugham and Coward', in *Raffles: The Story of Singapore* (Beckenham: Croon Helm, 1984), pp.161-4; Victor Purcell, *Memoirs of a Malayan Official* (London: Cassell, 1965), pp.248-50, pp.256-7; Roberto Pregarz, 'Somerset Maugham Another Story' and 'Raffles Writers', in *Memories of Raffles: 22 Years With a Grand Old Hotel* (Singapore: Treasury Publishing, 1990), pp.52-7, pp.74-83; Norman Sherry, 'Crime of Passion: A Real Life Murder that Inspired Somerset Maugham', *The Sunday Times* (Timescope Feature), Singapore, 30 May, 1976; Maurizio Peleggi, 'Consuming Colonial Nostalgia: The Monumentalization of Historical Hotels in Urban South-East Asia', in *Asia Pacific Viewpoint*, (December 2005), v.46, n.3, pp.255-65.

⁵ Gretchen Liu, *Raffles Hotel* (Singapore: Editions Didier Millet, 2006), p.91, hereafter cited as 'Liu, *Raffles Hotel* (2006)'; Raymond Flower, *Year of the Tiger* (Singapore: Times Books International, 1986), p.13, p.23-8; Ilsa Sharp, *There Is Only One Raffles: The Story of a Grand Hotel* (London: Souvenir Press, 1981), pp.103-8.

and historian Gretchen Liu, there is a photograph of Maugham and his secretary Alan Searle seated in the Palm Court, taken during his last visit to the hotel in 1959. (Fig.2.1.2) Just off the Palm Court, there is a small library of Maugham's first edition books kept discreetly for guests in a private study, comfortably furnished with armchairs and a writing desk, tucked underneath the main stairs of the ground level lobby. In the hotel's in-house museum, there is a vitrine devoted to Maugham memorabilia. It features Maugham's books, a description of his habit of writing in the Palm Court, a signed photograph of the writer and a letter from him to the hotel allowing it to publicly use his comment that the Raffles Hotel stood 'for all the fables of the Exotic East'. (Fig.2.1.3) Maugham's comment has since become ubiquitous, reappearing on the hotel's website, its stationery and advertisements.



2.1.2 W. Somerset Maugham and Alan Searle at the Palm Court, 1959.



2.1.3 Letter from Maugham permitting use of his line that the Raffles Hotel stands 'for all the fables of the Exotic East'.



2.1.4 'The historic hotel of Singapore' 1920s postcard series.

I have been both troubled and intrigued by the hotel's connection to Maugham. On the one hand, one may argue that the hotel has overplayed its connection to this writer, by using an efficient publicity machine to overwork colonial nostalgia. On the other hand, it would also be inaccurate to assume that the hotel's relationship to Maugham has been wholly invented through strategic advertisement. The hotel's publicity ultimately draws on and propagates a popular perception, which already firmly connects Maugham to the Raffles Hotel. For example, a visitor in the 1930s reputedly made the observation that during the 1920s and 1930s, the hotel was 'cherished rather for its Somerset Maugham associations than for the distinction of its décor'.⁶ Another guest visiting in the same decade remarked, 'We motored in a car of Cook's to the Raffles Hotel; here, I thought, was the East that Maugham, Sir Hugh Clifford, Bruce Lockhart and countless others have written about'.⁷ Today, it seems equally attractive to suggest that one might partake in the East that Maugham wrote about simply by staying at the hotel, particularly in one of the rooms overlooking the Palm Court, as independent contemporary travel guides, researchers, and newspaper journalists advise. Roberto Pregarz, a manager of the hotel from 1967 to 1989 who piloted the idea of the Personality Suites, reported that the Somerset Maugham Suite was in great demand almost immediately after it was first introduced in the 1980s.⁸

What concerns this inquiry is the architectural significance of Maugham's connection with this hotel. What does it mean to perceive this architecture through Maugham and his fables of the Exotic East? This question resonates especially in the Palm Court, a

⁶ Gretchen Liu, *Raffles Hotel* (Singapore: Landmark Books, 1999), p.95. Hereafter, referenced as 'Liu, *Raffles Hotel* (1999)'.

⁷ Liu, *Raffles Hotel* (2006), p.92.

⁸ Pregarz, 'Somerset Maugham Another Story', p.52.

small rectangular garden at the front end of the hotel, which is known for two things – its tropical vegetation, particularly the statuesque palm trees, and the writer who reputedly wrote his fables of the Exotic East from breakfast until lunch under these trees. My intimate encounter of the Palm Court, is thus, woven around these two things.

In architectural terms, very little is known about the Palm Court's historical formation. The hotel's private archive of old postcards from the first half of the twentieth century show that the different hotel buildings, for example, the Main Building, the Billiard Room, and the Palm Court Wing, were popularly featured in these postcards.⁹ However, in the 1920s, a set of seven postcards were issued, three of which featured the Palm Court as a centrepiece for the first time. (Fig.2.1.4) These postcards emphasized the Palm Court as a tropical garden with towering palm trees. During this period, the hotel saw an exponential rise in the number of guests from abroad, especially round-the-world tourists.¹⁰ In 1925 alone, it 'entertained 3,000 tourists from six different ships'.¹¹ The content of these postcards was consistent with a romanticized tropical landscape sought after by many of these tourists.¹² There are no explicit accounts in the hotel's private archives as to why the Palm Court became so significant in this period, and no hint of what warranted its prominence in these postcards. However, it is a period that

⁹ Liu, *Raffles Hotel* (2006), p.74 reprints some of these postcards featuring the hotel buildings. In 2000, the hotel reissued six old postcard designs under the 'Picture Perfect' series of 12 postcards. The series showcased the Main Building, the Bar and Billiard Room, the Bras Basah Wing and the cast iron verandah.

¹⁰ Liu, *Raffles Hotel* (2006), pp.84-6; Sharp, *There Is Only One Raffles*, pp.38-43.

¹¹ Liu, *Raffles Hotel* (2006), p.84

¹² For early twentieth-century touristic impressions of tropical landscape, see for example, John Bastin (ed.), *Travellers' Singapore: An Anthology* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1994), especially, Hermann Norden (1922) 'Perennially Fascinating Singapore', pp.197-8; Hubbard Hutchinson (1923), 'The Great Crossroads of the East', pp.199-201; W. Robert Foran (1934), 'Singapore's Seething Life', pp.213-23; and Aldous Huxley, *Jesting Pilate: Diary of a Journey* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1928).

also marked the arrival of Maugham himself in 1921, who as one of the new breed of cosmopolitan travelers, visited the hotel for the first time that year.

From the accumulation of physical artifacts, traces in the building fabric, anecdotal and recorded historical evidence, the image of Maugham in the Palm Court is indelible. This writer has become part of the hotel's flora. Maugham and the Palm Court are inextricably intertwined in this image, which I will argue in *Flora*, is a complex association involving a constructed notion of the 'Exotic East', the writer's fables, and gendered interpretations of this tropical garden.

In addition to these existing physical and historical links, I also propose a conceptual link between the writer and tropical flora. This conceptual floral connection is shaped by my attempt to read Maugham's occupation in the Palm Court through the feminine points of excess in his fiction and biographical details. The feminine points of excess are like fertile floral nodes of the architectural text, which enable critical and creative 'off-shoots' linking the writer to the 'Exotic East'. These interpretive floral 'off-shoots' are metonymic in nature, that is, they explore a critical connection of otherwise physically disparate contexts in relation to the Palm Court, using Maugham as the connective conduit between these different contexts. The three contexts, which I explore in the following chapter, *A Metonymic Web of the Palm Court*, include Maugham's fascination with the intoxicating atmosphere of the East; his love for gossip, and an alternative sexual self-definition cultivated through his nomadic writing practice.

However, it should be noted that although the Palm Court is popularly perceived through Maugham's presence as previously discussed, the emergent architectural history

of the hotel as a National Monument fails to acknowledge this point.¹³ While these accounts concentrate on Bidwell the architect, the alternative architectural formation of a space like the Palm Court through its occupant, Maugham, is notably absent. The Maugham connection is accordingly relegated as trivia by the architectural archive, as it is distinctly excluded from the architectural holdings in the custody of the National Archives, and when mentioned at all in the hotel's emergent architectural history, Maugham's link to the hotel is framed as no more than a prefatory anecdote.¹⁴

However, Maugham's occupation of the Palm Court persistently disturbs this experiencing subject's perception of this space. Instead of addressing the formal history of the garden and its architect-centred formation, this inquiry frames a set of questions and observations derived from this experiencing subject's intimate encounter of the Palm Court through her interest in its writer-occupant. *Flora* makes the figure of Maugham central to the architectural interpretation of the Palm Court. It suggests a reinvigorated architectural subject of this garden, which enfolds this experiencing subject's encounter with Maugham into architectural discourse.

The spatio-temporal context of this intimate encounter through Maugham, is described by what I have called an 'architectural time-out-of-joint'. This complex framework

¹³ For a discussion on the hotel's emergent architectural history and the architectural narrative of the National Monument, see *Empirical Contexts*, pp.99-109.

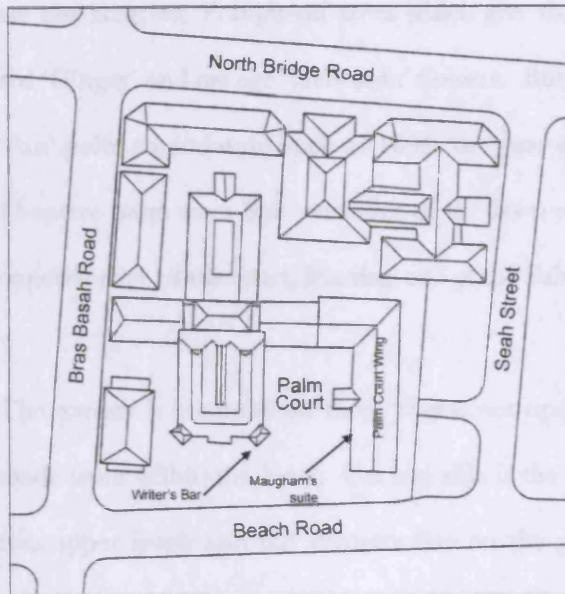
¹⁴ Maugham's occupation of the Palm Court is mentioned but distinctly separated from the 'architectural' analysis for example, in Jane Beamish and Jane Ferguson, *A History of Singapore Architecture: The Making of a City* (Singapore: Graham Brash, 1985), pp.80-2; Norman Edwards and Peter Keys, *Singapore: A Guide to Buildings, Streets, Places* (Singapore: Times Books International, 1988), pp.279-80; Gretchen Liu, *In Granite and Chunam: The National Monuments of Singapore* (Singapore: Landmark Books, 1996), pp.230-41. Sources which do not mention Maugham, include for example: M. Gretchen, *Pastel Portraits: Singapore's Architectural Heritage* (Singapore: Singapore Coordinating Committee, 1984), pp.138-40; Robert Powell, *Living Legacy: Singapore's Architectural Heritage Renewed* (Singapore: Singapore Heritage Society, 1997), pp.176-83.

gathers within the contemporary space of the Palm Court, two sets of subjects, times and spaces. On the one hand, there is the complex subject of Maugham, his time spent travelling and writing in Southeast Asia in the 1920s and 1930s, the time he spent in the Palm Court, and the spaces he both physically inhabited and imaginatively created in his books. On the other hand, there is the contemporary time and space of this experiencing subject, her feminist stance, her contemporary knowledge of the writer and interest in the gendered interpretation of the Palm Court through Maugham. Thus, this intimate encounter of the Palm Court is re-conceptualized as a discursive web, which brings together subjects, times and spaces related to Maugham as well as those related to this experiencing subject in the contemporary moment.

Physical and Architectural Descriptions

The Palm Court is one of contemporary Raffles Hotel's key attractions. Featured in old postcards, old photographs and contemporary images, this garden is still a popular backdrop for group photographs today. It is a rectangular lawn, open to the sky, measuring no more than 630 square metres in area, and located between the Main Building, where the hotel lobby is found, and the L-shaped Palm Court Wing, facing Beach Road.¹⁵ (Fig.2.1.5) Fastidiously maintained by the hotel's gardeners, planting is kept to the edges of the garden, with more profuse vegetation along the fourth edge facing the busy arterial Beach Road.

¹⁵ Although the Palm Court is a key space, it only constitutes 2.3% of the hotel's total land area. Figures provided by Raffles Hotel.



2.1.5 Location Plan of the Palm Court.



2.1.6 Palm trees fringing the Palm Court

Here, one finds notably, the 'Traveller's Palm', a tree with leaves measuring six feet long, radiating from the central trunk like a fan. Its leaves store rainwater in their stems and it

is said that the water was used by weary travelers, thus giving this tree its name. There are also fragrant ‘Frangipani’ trees which give the garden its strong sweet scent, and fiery red ‘Ginger’ and orange ‘Heliconia’ flowers. But most distinctively, there are two rows of ‘Fan’ palm trees dating back to 1894, the year in which this garden took shape.¹⁶ The 14-metre palm trees line two sides of the lawn – the side of the Main Building and the opposite edge of the court, fronting one of the Palm Court Wings. (Fig.2.1.6)

The garden is enclosed on three edges, not open to the public and access can only be made from within the hotel. On one side is the Main Building with luxury suites on the two upper levels and the Writer’s Bar on the ground level. The other two edges are bordered by the triple storey L-shaped Palm Court Wing, which houses ten of the hotel’s most popular accommodations, called the Personality Suites.¹⁷ These rooms are named and furnished after famous figures who have stayed here or have been associated with the hotel in the past. Suite No.102 on the first storey of the block opposite the Main Building, is named after Maugham. All rooms open onto wide and airy timber verandahs, which surround the garden on three levels. Although the garden is out of bounds to the public, it is well overlooked by these verandahs. As such, the user of the Palm Court does not enjoy complete privacy.

¹⁶ The palm trees planted in the Palm Court are ‘Fan’ Palms, or the *Livistonia Rotundiflora* variety. Information provided by the Raffles Hotel.

¹⁷ Besides the Somerset Maugham Suite, other suites are named after famous personalities, for example, Pablo Neruda, Noel Coward, James A. Michener, Rudyard Kipling, Joseph Conrad, Andre Malraux and Charlie Chaplin. The suite contains a small plaque with the name of the individual at the door, decorated with antique furniture that coincides with the historical period of the personality’s stay at the hotel, photographs of the personality and books written by them, as well as complimentary hotel stationery with the personality’s name. Maugham’s suite has photographs of him, and two letters from him to the hotel – including the one which gives the hotel permission to use his words ‘for all the fable of the Exotic East’. Information provided by Raffles Hotel.

Programmatically, the Palm Court is an empty and flexible space. Its use as a garden has been fairly consistent, with the exception of a period between 1960 and 1989, when part of the site was converted into a swimming pool.¹⁸ It has previously hosted dances, special dinners, skating, and New Year's Day parties.¹⁹ In 1989, as part of the hotel's overall conservation project, the Palm Court was restored.²⁰ Its present layout is modeled after the garden as it might have appeared in 1915, a date appointed by the Conservation Committee as a historical benchmark for conservation of this National Monument.²¹

There is no existing architectural history of the Palm Court. No mention was made of this garden when it was formed in 1894. In the hotel's private archives, two newspaper cuttings report the opening of a new wing in early December 1894.²² The first report in *The Straits Times* described in some detail the quality of workmanship, materials and spaces offered by new 'L-shaped' double storey building, which would add another thirty suites to the hotel. It also mentioned the involvement of architects Swan and MacLaren – as a guarantee of quality and distinction to the project. The second report in the weekly edition of the *Singapore Free Press* echoed the same interest in the building. In neither report, was there a mention of this garden. Insofar as the hotel's architectural records show, there are no specific documents revealing any architectural design intentions for the Palm Court. The garden appears to have resulted through default of the architectural layout – an accidental space that emerged from the construction of the new L-shaped block and the Main Building. There are no known records in the hotel's

¹⁸ Information provided by Raffles Hotel.

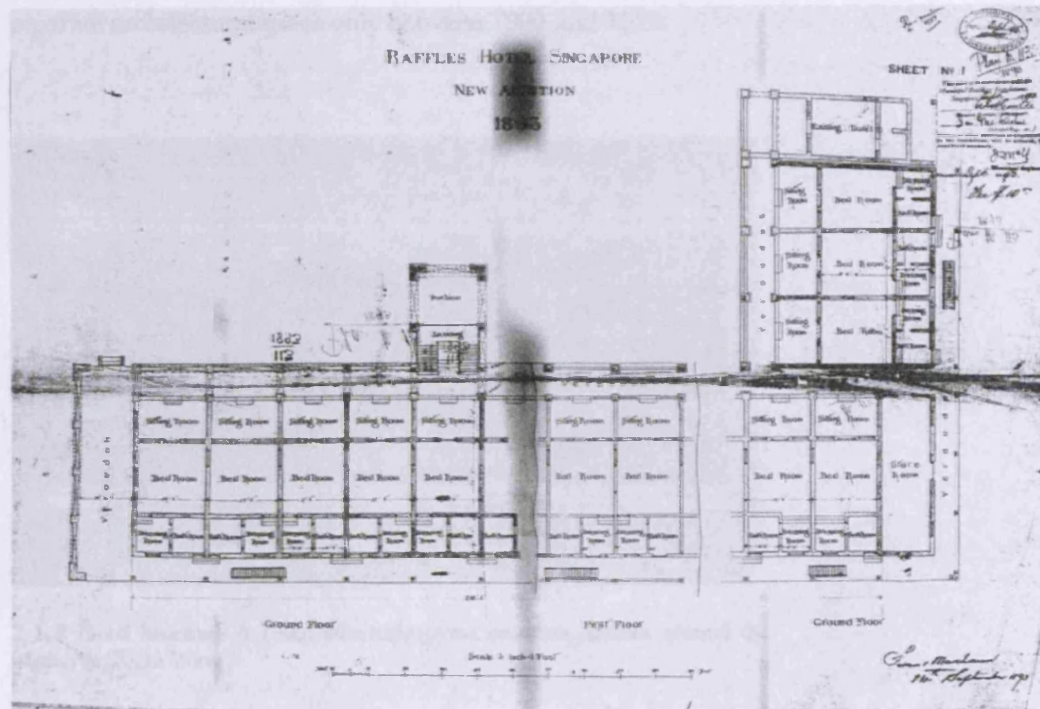
¹⁹ Liu, *Raffles Hotel* (1999), p.103-10

²⁰ Landscape work by Belt Collins International.

²¹ For conservation process, see *Empirical Contexts*, pp.97-8.

²² 'Raffles Hotel: Opening of a New Wing', in *The Straits Times*, 11 December 1894; 'Raffles Hotel', in *Singapore Free Press* (weekly edition), 11 December 1894.

private archives about the garden's history and no details of who named the garden or why it took on this name.



2.1.7 Architectural plans for the Palm Court Wing by Swan and MacLaren, c.1893.

In the architect's drawings of 1893, which show the addition of the new L-shaped block, the Palm Court is neither labeled nor drawn in as an intentional space. (Fig.2.1.7) As late as 1905, the garden remained unnamed. A hotel brochure in the same year, currently exhibited in the hotel's museum, shows the main spaces including the new Main Building, its luxurious marble dining hall, the hotel's spacious verandahs and the new L-shaped block with its garden.²³ (Fig.2.1.8) The image of the L-shaped building was annotated simply as 'Right Wing'. The 'Palm Court' only seems to have sprung up as a distinctive space in a series of hotel postcards published in the 1920s under 'The Historic

²³ The 1905 brochure is exhibited in the hotel's museum. A copy of its pages is reprinted in Gretchen Liu's commissioned history of the Raffles Hotel. See Liu, *Raffles Hotel* (1999), pp.72-3.

Hotel of Singapore' series.²⁴ (see Fig.2.1.4) In these postcards, the Palm Court is the focal point of the image rather than a backdrop for the hotel buildings. From the historical evidence available, it may be speculated that the Palm Court became a separate architectural space only between 1905 and 1920.



2.1.8 Hotel brochure (c.1905) advertising new accommodations around the garden as 'Right Wing'.

By conventional standards, this space has merited little architectural mention compared to the buildings surrounding it. So, how does one discuss it architecturally? This thesis re-conceptualizes an architectural discourse in relation to Maugham and the tropical floral fabric of this garden. Through a close reading of an intimate detail in the Palm Court, that is, the palm tree, I will explore the floral plot of 'grafting' – an architectural concept that re-structures the garden's architectural space and time, according to an intimate encounter with Maugham.

²⁴ 1920s Raffles Hotel postcards issued as 'The Historic Hotel of Singapore' series, holdings in hotel's private archives. Six of the cards are reprinted in Liu, *Raffles Hotel* (1999), pp.20-1.

The Palm Tree: Interpreting the Intimate Detail

The architectural image and spatial character of the Palm Court relies inherently on a key object – the palm tree. The palm tree is an icon that appears in almost every contemporary and historical photograph, image or drawing of the hotel, including postage stamps, hotel stationery, posters, commissioned mural paintings like the one in the hotel’s ballroom, and is a key motif of the hotel’s emblem. (Figs.2.1.9-2.1.12) The preservation guidelines issued by the Urban Redevelopment Authority and the Preservation of Monuments Board expressly state that the palm trees were to be maintained.²⁵ I argue that the palm tree is a detail that signifies the Raffles Hotel.

For example, an American tourist, Charlotte Cameron, who visited the hotel in 1922 remarked that the entire architecture was ‘profusely decorated with gigantic palms’.²⁶ It is significant that Cameron’s perception of the hotel entirely smothered by ‘palms and trees’ becomes the enduring image, which she records. Similarly, in examining the numerous group portraits taken at the Palm Court over the decades, the palm frond inevitably entered the fringes of these portraits – in outline, silhouette and shadow – and came to stand for the Raffles Hotel, an enduring image now scattered in various private collections, drawers, envelopes, boxes, caches and albums. (Fig.2.1.13)

²⁵ *Raffles Hotel Preservation Guidelines*, Vol. 1 (Singapore: Urban Redevelopment Authority and Preservation of Monuments Board, June 1997), p.32.

²⁶ Charlotte Cameron, ‘This Mystic Eastern City’ (1922), original excerpt from *Wanderings in South-Eastern Seas*, reprinted in Michael Wise (ed.), *Travellers’ Tales Of Old Singapore* (Singapore: Times Books International, 1985), pp.187-90; here p.188. Four decades later in the 1960s, writer James Kirkup records a similar observation, ‘The Raffles Hotel, a dream of whiteness, like a big wedding-cake set among traveller’s palms on “gracious lawns”’. See James Kirkup, *Tropic Temper: A Memoir of Malaya* (London: Collins, 1963), p.86.

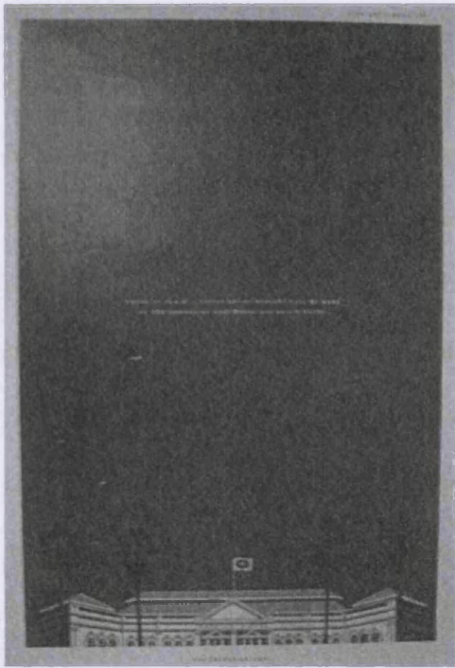


2.1.9 Palm trees in detail from the Ballroom's mural.

RAFFLES HOTEL



2.1.10 Palm trees featured in contemporary lithograph of hotel.



2.1.11 Poster to commemorate hotel's re-opening in 1991.



2.1.12 Postage stamp to commemorate hotel's re-opening in 1991.



2.1.13 Group portraits taken in the Palm Court.

The palm tree is a signifier par excellence of tropical flora. Horticultural historian Torah Martin succinctly states that, ‘there is nothing more exotic than a palm’,²⁷ while cultural historian Nancy Leys Stepan elaborates that the palm tree ‘was responsible for much of the aesthetic impact that tropical landscapes had on the human imagination’ and, ‘thus, came to be valued in themselves primarily as objects of nature, ... signaling less a botanical species than an imaginative submersion in hot places’.²⁸ Architectural historians Georg Kohlmaier and Barna von Sartory also affirm that, ‘the travel fantasy of the middle class in the nineteenth century was linked to the palm’.²⁹ For Martin, Stepan, Kohlmaier and von Sartory, the palm tree is a cultural signifier capable of triggering in the imagination, particular spaces and experiences associated with the hot and humid tropical countries, ‘exotic’ to the European sensibility.

Here, I propose an exploration of the palm tree as the Palm Court’s intimate detail. The palm tree is an object that one cannot but take notice of when experiencing or remembering the Palm Court. Yet, according to archival material, this detail is unintentional to the architectural design since there is no evidence of any specific planting plan. The palm tree ‘pricks’ my attention. An examination of this intimate detail shows that it can take on contradictory meanings: it is an element, which can be both domesticated and subversive, that is, interpreted as a botanical commodity passively possessed through colonial expansion and domination of hot countries, but at the same time, acting as a detail of feminine excess linked to an unknown tropical landscape. As an intimate detail, the palm tree encapsulates not only the physical and visual attributes

²⁷ Torah Martin, ‘The Victorian Fern and Palm Craze’, in *Once Upon a Windowsill: A History of Indoor Plants* (Portland, Oregon: Timber Press, 1988), pp.190-213; here p.206.

²⁸ Nancy Leys Stepan, *Picturing Tropical Nature* (London: Reaktion Press, 2001), p.19.

²⁹ Georg Kohlmaier and Barna von Sartory, *Houses of Glass: A Nineteenth-Century Building Type*, trans. John C. Harvey (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1986), p.50.

crucial to the experience of this garden, it also embeds the imaginary, emotive and sensual characteristics associated with this architectural space. The palm tree stands for the 'Exotic East', and as such, signifies Maugham's fictional tropical landscapes.

I suggest there are at least two different interpretations of the palm tree, which are key to this discussion. On the one hand, the palm tree is frequently framed in historical situations as a domesticated and passive feminized object. On the other hand, this passive feminine state may also be re-interpreted as uncontainable or excessive, and thus, a transgressive element. Ultimately, I argue for an understanding of the second perspective in order to interrogate the motivations behind the prevalent first assumption. I argue that the image of the palm tree as a contained, passive and domesticated object is symptomatic of the culturally constructed and symbolic, albeit patriarchal, representation of nature as a repressed and passive feminine condition. I also contend that the spatial notion of the 'Exotic East' is neither quaint nor naïve, but embeds a gendered position, which has been neglected in the context of this hotel's colonial architectural history.

The portrayal of the palm tree as a passive domesticated object was prevalent in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a period which saw the palm tree's popular appearance in public winter gardens and private hothouses in Europe and in England, where there was already in the latter, an established passion for professional and amateur horticulture of exotic plants.³⁰ In Singapore, the Botanic Gardens, which opened in 1859 initially as a pleasure garden, and eventually as a satellite centre for the research and collection of plants for Kew from 1874, featured a fashionable collection of palm

³⁰ Kohlmaier and von Sartory, *Houses of Glass*, pp.25-42; Stefan Koppelkamm, *Glasshouses and Wintergardens of the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Katherine Talbot (London: Granada, 1981), pp.29-30.

trees as one of its key tourist attractions.³¹ In England, following late nineteenth-century scientific botanical endeavours boosting the collection, cataloguing and horticulture of new exotic plants and seeds in the Royal Botanical Gardens at Kew, the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries saw popular interest in tropical hothouse varieties.³² These plants had become more accessible through widespread prosperity amongst individuals who had benefited from the successful industrial revolution as well as a growing population who had traveled afar and developed exotic horticultural tastes.³³

The demand for horticultural exotics, especially the ubiquitous palm tree, propelled an increased availability of commercial stocks in urban garden centres during this period. For example, there were London garden centres specializing in palm trees, including Wills and Segar Florists of South Kensington, Veitch Nursery on King's Road in Chelsea, and the Victoria and Paradise Nurseries in Upper Holloway.³⁴ (Fig.2.1.14) Expert advice suggested that these plants – including palms, ferns, orchids and pitcher exotic plants – were eminently suited for all domestic interiors.³⁵ For example,

³¹ For history of the Singapore Botanic Gardens, see Bonnie Tinsley, *Visions of Delight: The Singapore Botanic Gardens Through the Ages* (Singapore: Singapore Botanic Gardens, 1989), pp.14-41; <http://www.sbg.org.sg/aboutus/ourhistory.asp> (Accessed 1 April 2006).

³² For imperial horticultural activities at Kew, see Ray Desmond, *Kew: History of the Royal Botanic Gardens* (London: Harvill, 1995), pp.206-22, pp.251-67.

³³ For example, see Kohlmaier and von Sartory, *Houses of Glass*, pp.40-2, pp.49-52; Brent Elliot, *Victorian Gardens* (London: B.T. Batsford Ltd., 1990), pp.185-7. For a historical account of palm trees as indoor decoration at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, see Martin, 'The Victorian Fern and Palm Craze', pp.206-13.

³⁴ See James Herbert Veitch, *Hortus Veitchii: A History of the Rise and Progress of the Nurseries of Messrs. James Veitch and Sons* (London: J. Veitch and Sons, 1906) for history of Veitch Nurseries; catalogues for Wills and Segar and the Victoria and Paradise Nurseries were obtained from the Royal Horticultural Society's (RHS) library and archives.

³⁵ See for example, John Wills, 'Plants for House Decoration', in *Journal of the Royal Horticultural Society* (1893), v.15, pp.84-8; William Taylor, 'Fine Foliage Plants for Indoor Decoration', in *The Journal of Horticulture and Cottage Gardener*, (June 10, 1875), p.443. Wills recommends the palm as a key plant for domestic decoration

nineteenth-century palm specialist Wills and Segar Florist advertised that palms were versatile enough to be contained in ‘winter gardens, drawing rooms, lawns, terraces, entrance halls, conservatories, sub-tropical gardens, dinner table decorations, vases and jardineres’.³⁶ Floral decoration guides suggested that palm trees offered a tasteful antidote to excessive opulence, and even proposed it as suitable table dressing.³⁷ Victorian women’s house manuals advised that the palm tree was ornamentally suitable for the house, an economical investment and respectably restrained in taste.³⁸

Yet, the interest in palm trees already established itself much earlier with public displays of tropical exotic plants in the Great Exhibition of 1851, where Joseph Paxton, the architect of the original Crystal Palace in Hyde Park, furnished the tropical plant house with palm trees sourced from the Hackney Botanic Nursery, London’s foremost supplier of palms during the late eighteenth to mid nineteenth centuries.³⁹ At Kew, the Palm House designed by architect Decimus Burton, was commissioned specifically to show off the collection of exotic palms initially introduced to Europe through Kew in the early Victorian years. It quickly established itself as a popular visitor attraction when it was

while Taylor advocates that ‘niches and corners in mansions’ may be ‘judiciously’ furnished by ‘a noble Palm’, which adds symmetry to the architectural space.

³⁶ Catalogue for Wills and Segar Florists Artistic Floral Decorators and Palm Growers of Onslow, South Kensington, c.1898, p5. (From: RHS Archive)

³⁷ F. W. Burbidge, *Domestic Floriculture: Window-Gardening and Floral Decorations* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1875), pp.159-60. The first palm tree seen ‘growing’ out of a dinner table as part of the centerpiece of a table decoration was at an exhibition in 1870 at Crystal Palace in Sydenham. The fashion quickly caught on and was replicated at many London mansions.

³⁸ See Mary Rose Blacker, *Flora Domestica: A History of Flower Arranging 1500-1930* (London: The National Trust, 2000), pp.215-6.

³⁹ The Hackney Botanic Nursery founded by Conrad Loddiges in 1771, stocked between 150-170 types of palms in the 1830s. See Koppelkamm, *Glasshouses and Wintergardens*, p.16.

completed in 1848.⁴⁰ (Fig.2.1.15) Here, exotic plants as varied as palm trees, banana trees, bamboos, tropical grasses, cannas, bird of paradise flowers, ginger roots, rubber, coffee and cacao trees, cane creepers, pepper and chillies were contained in a large glass house. As literary historian Maria Noëlle Ng argues, imperial displays at Crystal Palace and Kew catalogued exotic objects as passive commodities, which were part of a 'colonial adventure ... (and) objectified as colonial lessons for the masses'.⁴¹ Thus, in these colonial displays as well as in domestic interiors, the palm tree was perceived as a passive, feminine ornament, which could be easily domesticated and kept under control in pots, glass houses and on dinner tables.



2.1.14 'Wills and Segar for Palms'.

⁴⁰ The Palm House at Kew was completed in 1848 by Richard Turner to architect Decimus Burton's designs. It is a Grade 1 listed building. It has the world's most important surviving Victorian glass and iron structure. See Desmond, *Kew*, pp.157-68; Koppelkamm, *Glasshouses and Wintergardens*, p.30; Martin, 'The Victorian Fern and Palm Craze', pp.206-7.

⁴¹ Maria Noëlle Ng, *Three Exotic Views of Southeast Asia: The Travel Narrative of Isabella Bird, Max Dauthendey and Ai Wu, 1850-1930* (New York: EastBridge, 2002), p.16. See also Timothy Mitchell, 'Orientalism and the Exhibitionary Order', in Nicholas Mirzoeff (ed.), *The Visual Culture Reader* (London: Routledge, 1998), pp.293-303.



2.1.15 Palm House at Kew.

Yet, interestingly, one of the world's experts on palms, E. J. H. Corner – who served as Assistant Director at the Singapore Botanic Gardens (1929-1945) and Professor of Tropical Botany at Cambridge University (1949-1973) – suggested in his seminal documentation of palm trees that this plant was one of the most 'intractable' and 'neglected' subjects in the field of botany:

Strangers to the palm lands sketch and photograph, gather seed for their distant gardens and greenhouses, and rejoice generally in the realization of book-knowledge, but they find the palms too massive or intractable for ordinary scientific approach. It is necessary to live with palms for many years in order to appreciate them. ... We find that few scientists have been able to cope with

palms and that fewer still have made the effort to build up palm science. We find, in fact, no major group of plants so neglected in its study.⁴²

Here, contrary to the controlled and domesticated image of the palm discussed previously, Corner suggests that it is an unexplored object, holding facts and possibilities excessive to what we, or in Corner's case, the scientific community, already knows about it. Following Corner, I also argue that the palm tree may be perceived as an extravagant figure. If we consider the palm tree as intimate detail, then, I argue that it points to the feminized and fertile body of the 'Exotic East' – a notion closely associated with the tropics.

In her intriguing conceptualization of the maternal body as a kind of 'torrid zone', feminist literary theorist Felicity Nussbaum appropriates the 'geographical torrid zone between the Tropic of Cancer and the Tropic of Capricorn' as akin to the 'torrid zone mapped onto the human body, especially the female human body'.⁴³ Nussbaum's comparison of the maternal and sexualized body with the bodily qualities attributed to the 'torrid zone' revolves around the eighteenth-century geographical rhetoric, which claimed that fecundity and excess of flora and fauna around these regions were not simply paradisiacal but bred rank and wantonness in their human occupants.⁴⁴

⁴² E. J. H. Corner, *The Natural History of Palms* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966), pp.1-3. For an account of Corner's service at the Singapore Botanic Gardens during World War Two, see Tinsley, *Visions of Delight*, p.32.

⁴³ Felicity A. Nussbaum, *Torrid Zones: Maternity, Sexuality, and Empire in Eighteenth-Century English Narratives* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), p.7. I am grateful to Jane Rendell for bringing this text to my attention.

⁴⁴ Nussbaum, *Torrid Zones*, pp.8-10.

Similarly, Stepan reminds us that tropical nature, which became more popular in the nineteenth century through scientific expeditions, widespread travel and changes in horticultural tastes, crucially operated through notions of fertility and superabundance.⁴⁵ She points out that nineteenth-century naturalists ‘instructed and confirmed’ that tropical nature was to be contrasted with what was at home, and in a sense made their ‘natural’ discourse ‘part of the formation of British identity, as a place of temperateness, control, hardwork and thriftiness, in distinction to the humidity, heat, extravagance, and superfluidity of the torrid zone’.⁴⁶ The notion of tropical indolence was linked to ‘the topos of tropical effeminacy and sexuality’,⁴⁷ which insidiously engendered the constituents of the tropical landscape and its occupants as placidly feminine.⁴⁸

Here, I attempt to re-frame the palm tree as a cultural and historicized artifact. My understanding of this feminized exotic landscape borrows from Margaret Whitford’s interpretation of Luce Irigaray’s subversive re-conceptualization of nature. According to Whitford, Irigaray’s ‘nature’ is not opposed to culture or the symbolic, not what is essential or pre-symbolic, but that which is symbolized as nature by a patriarchal system, ‘those parts of himself where the male imaginary has split off and projected – into the world, on to women’.⁴⁹ This notion of ‘nature’ as ‘split off’ and ‘projected’ patriarchal detritus also corresponds with Stepan’s interpretation of how nineteenth-century natural

⁴⁵ Nancy Leys Stepan, ‘Tropical Nature as a Way of Writing’, in A. Lafuente, A. Elena and M. L. Ortega (eds.), *Mundialización de la Ciencia y Cultura Nacional* (Madrid: Doce Calles, 1993), pp.495-504; here p.497.

⁴⁶ Stepan, ‘Tropical Nature as a Way of Writing’, pp.496-8.

⁴⁷ Stepan, ‘Tropical Nature as a Way of Writing’, p.498.

⁴⁸ For examples of late nineteenth-century descriptions, which feminized the tropical landscape, see Isabella Bird, *The Golden Chersonese and the Way Thither* (London: John Murray, 1883), pp.107-20; Marianne North, ‘Garden Delights’ (1876) in Bastin, *Travellers’ Singapore*, pp.111-14; John Cameron, *Our Tropical Possessions in Malayan India* (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1865), pp.27-9.

⁴⁹ Margaret Whitford, *Luce Irigaray: Philosophy in the Feminine* (London: Routledge, 1991), p.95.

history writers symbolically portrayed an extraordinary 'other' tropical world as feminized, excessive, voluptuous, slovenly and diseased.⁵⁰ Irigaray's use of 'natural' terms such as the notion of 'woman as plant', constitutes a subversive act of reclaiming what is cut off from a symbolic patriarchal order.⁵¹

According to Irigaray's radical conception of 'nature', the conventional view of tropical nature and the palm tree as passive feminine objects, reflects a hierarchical and exclusive knowledge installed and controlled by patriarchal colonial epistemology. I am interested in rehabilitating the repressed feminine of tropical flora, and to complicate the passive perception of the palm tree in particular, by recognizing it as an intimate detail, which is expansive in its meanings. Through this excessive detail, my architectural interpretation brings together spaces and subject positions, which have been neglected by the hotel's emergent architectural history, especially a gendered interpretation of the Palm Court, which is presently depicted as a gender-neutral space. I will develop the proposition of the Palm Court as space of feminine excess through a discussion of Maugham's portrayal of the 'Exotic East' and his own occupation of this garden. This discussion is informed by the 'floral plot' of the Palm Court.

The floral plot is an architectural concept that critically re-orders the spatial and temporal contexts of the Palm Court such that 'facts' which are excessive to the hotel's emergent architectural history but key to the intimate encounter, for example, Maugham's occupation, is re-considered. The floral plot is defined by the excessive and feminized palm tree, which is a signifier of the 'Exotic East' and linked to the writer who

⁵⁰ Stepan, *Picturing Tropical Nature*, p.50.

⁵¹ Elaine P. Miller, *The Vegetative Soul: From Philosophy of Nature to Subjectivity in the Feminine* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), p.197; see also, *An Architecture of Intimate Encounter*, pp.147-9.

popularized this notion in his fiction and who occupied this garden. I call this expansive 'plant-like' architectural concept, 'grafting'.

The Floral Plot: 'Grafting' the Palm Court

Graft:

- i. to join a piece of tissue from a part of one plant to the stem and root system of another plant to generate a new plant, which has beneficial qualities, for example, reinvigorated growth or, a resistance to disease
- ii. to link two things that do not share a natural affinity for each other
- iii. to embed something unfamiliar, new or monstrous
- iv. to generate by cross-fertilization

As the Palm Court's floral plot, grafting is an architectural concept which develops the feminine extravagance of the palm tree. I advocate it as a way of conceptually restructuring the Palm Court's space and time following a generative and excessive feminine quality. The floral plot of grafting re-interprets this garden through metonymic profusion, whereby subjects, spaces and times contiguously associated with, that is, elements with a proximate relationship to this experiencing subject's architectural

encounter with Maugham's spatial occupation of the Palm Court, are critically configured into architectural discourse. As discussed earlier, metonymy is a process of association that works through the connective possibilities between proximate ideas and/or things.⁵² The metonymic process of grafting allows for what is surplus to normative interpretations of the Palm Court, that is, ideas or things that are repressed or unrecognized by architectural discourse, to be critically re-engaged, for example here, a gendered architectural reading of the Palm Court through Maugham and his 'Exotic East'.

Philosopher Jacques Derrida describes grafting as a transformative and deformative process in which:

... two texts ... contaminate each other's content, tend at times to reject each other, or pass elliptically one into the other and become regenerated in the repetition, along the edges of an overcast seam. Each grafted text continues to radiate back toward the site of its removal, transforming that, too, as it affects the new territory.⁵³

In the case of the Palm Court, the two components are the architectural space and its occupants, or this experiencing subject and Maugham, for example. In either case, the intimate encounter is a transformative process, where none of the components remain unchanged in their respective positions. When conceptualized through Maugham's occupation, the spatial typology of the Palm Court exceeds formal architectural categories based on form, style and function. Instead, the Palm

⁵² See *An Architecture of Intimate Encounter*, pp.147-50.

⁵³ Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (London: Athlone Press, 2000), p.355.

Court's metonymic spatial typology may be conceptualized as a web of associative spaces, times and subjects, which may or may not be conventionally linked to the Palm Court, but are speculatively gathered here by this experiencing subject's intimate encounter.

This web is constructed from my architectural knowledge of the Palm Court, a contemporary feminist interest in the public, private and literary lives of Maugham, an understanding of the cultural, historical and architectural contexts surrounding tropical flora, and my attempt to articulate a gendered interpretation of an architectural space embedded within a patriarchal framework of colonial architectural history. Thus, in a way, the metonymic typology of the Palm Court, which will be discussed in the following chapter, is undeniably a partial construction and contingent upon my agency as an experiencing subject.

However, the construction takes place through points of encounter, which are not simply arbitrary or personal since points of personal interest necessarily intersect, negotiate and transform existing symbolic representations, for example, Maugham's reputation as colonial writer and closet homosexual, the notion of the Palm Court as a tropical landscape, and the popular link between the 'Exotic East' and the Palm Court, fueled by Maugham's now ubiquitous comment of the hotel standing 'for all the fables of the Exotic East', and the image of him writing in the garden.

Through grafting, the inquiry of the Palm Court and its relationship to Maugham occurs in a 'time-out-of-joint', by bringing together, through an intimate encounter, contemporary feminist concerns for architectural epistemology, which on the one hand,

strive to articulate historical subject positions that have not yet been examined, and on the other hand, express a critical restlessness with ‘unified’ architectural interpretations prevalent in the empirical context of Southeast Asian architectural research, which problematically remains unruffled by gendered positions or the experiencing subject. Hence, grafting the Palm Court through an investigation of its feminine excess inherently advances my own feminist agenda as a specifically gendered experiencing subject. The discussion will also be in unjoined time insofar as it does not strive to offer a comprehensive architectural history of the Palm Court based on chronological sequence. My aim, instead, is to reflect the complexity of simultaneous subjects, spaces and times, potentially in formation within this intimate encounter with the Palm Court.

My understanding of grafting is inspired by, and develops from, the radical theoretical ‘botanical’ models of thought suggested by Jacques Derrida (‘dissemination’), Gilles Deleuze (‘rhizomatic growth’) and Irigaray (‘efflorescence’). In particular I draw on the analyses of these botanical models by feminist literary theorists Claudette Sartillot and Elaine P. Miller, who re-contextualize them as critiques of sexual difference, critically interpreting these models within the context of an alternative feminine subjectivity.⁵⁴

Examining Derrida’s concept of ‘dissemination’, Sartillot argues for a transformative ‘botanical’ model of literary discourse, which privileges ‘difference and metamorphosis’.⁵⁵ She adopts the flower as a conceptual model of critique. Sartillot activates what is conventionally recognized as passive and weak in association with the flower, as a subversive force:

⁵⁴ Claudette Sartillot, *Herbarium Verbarium: The Discourse of Flowers* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993); Miller, *The Vegetative Soul*.

⁵⁵ Sartillot, *Herbarium Verbarium*, p.2.

The botanical model of dissemination does not oppose signification or production (of meaning) but proposes an extravagant reading that reveals the act of writing as providing an excess of syntax over semantics, a waste, a squandering of seeds (and semes) out of which meaning is eventually gathered. The flower becomes the signifier par excellence, demonstrating the subsidiary roles to which the Western philosophical tradition based on truth, knowledge, and reason has relegated the flower, the feminine, the unconscious, the random, the nonlinear, sexuality, and, of course, the signifier in general.⁵⁶

Sartiliot argues that the excessive modes of signification supplied by the floral motif in literary discourse generates ways of thinking and communicating beyond what is established by a patriarchal system of knowledge, which emphasizes ‘the same, ... the father’ and which ‘always sprung from the interstices of their monuments and laws’.⁵⁷ Her project identifies the floral motif in theoretical and literary texts, which acts conceptually as a disruptive ‘nodal point’ that admits into ‘the patriarchal world of order, teleology, and closure’, what has been previously excluded, these being, ‘the literary, the feminine, the disseminative’.⁵⁸ Sartiliot proposes that the presence of floral nodes in such texts (she mentions those by Derrida, Deleuze, Irigaray and Hélène Cixous) ‘seems motivated by the writer’s desire to repair the Cartesian division of body and mind, subject and object, inside and outside’.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Sartiliot, *Herbarium Verbarium*, p.18.

⁵⁷ Sartiliot, *Herbarium Verbarium*, p.84.

⁵⁸ Sartiliot, *Herbarium Verbarium*, p.13, p.14.

⁵⁹ Sartiliot, *Herbarium Verbarium*, p.42.

Sartiliot suggests that the presence of the floral node in a text transforms discourse from its nominal role as a channel of linear interpretive meaning into a disruptive, critical force. The floral node is metonymic, inevitably leading to complex connections, off-branching ‘shoots’ of knowledge, which Sartiliot argues has been ‘rejected and repressed in logocentric systems of thought and knowledge’ since they contest simple binary knowledge.⁶⁰ In this sense, Sartiliot’s ‘floral node’ is similar to the metonymic architectural concept of grafting as the latter is also engaged in re-interpreting the architectural text of the Palm Court for unseen or repressed connections, by reading Maugham’s fiction and biographical details for points of feminine excess, that is, for inconsistencies in how Maugham represented himself and others represented him as a heterosexual masculine subject, and also to explore the contradictory meanings attached to the spaces he occupied.

Miller’s philosophical study suggests that plants can offer a critical model of interpretation, which emphasizes the contingency of the reader (or in this case, the experiencing subject) in the construction of meaning. She proposes that what is surplus to conventional modes of signification may be teased out through a ‘plant-like reading’:

A plant-like reading might unfold something like this: one may start with an idea, or start with a very straightforward reading of a text. Then the ‘seed’ metamorphoses into a ‘stem’, ‘node’, or ‘leaf’, and without any specific intention on the part of the author it begins to transform itself into something else. Then a commentary, or a poem, or something overheard contributes to the reading, and it metamorphoses again. One’s final reading will never be final, never

⁶⁰ Sartiliot, *Herbarium Verbarium*, pp.33-4.

exhaustive. ... The reading will always grow beyond the initial frame around which it is structured.⁶¹

Although Miller is describing the actual process of reading a text, I am interested in developing the ‘metonymical profusion’⁶² articulated in her description, that is, how different circumstances encountered by the reader in her reading of the text – these circumstances may or may not be directly produced by the text or correspond to the author’s intention – influence the reader’s understanding of the text.⁶³ This description aligns with the architecture of intimate encounter and reiterates the relational role of the experiencing subject in the construction of the ‘architectural subject’ of encounter, a subject position which supplements, and often contests, a dominant architect-centred discourse, for example, the emergent architectural history of this hotel that focuses on Bidwell and his intentions.

Miller’s discussion of this metonymic profusion is especially lucid in her examples of theoretical concepts that envision, ‘interpretation as vegetative growth, untraceable to singular or determinate origins, disseminating and productive rather than reducibly polysemic and analytic’.⁶⁴ In particular, she explores Derrida’s ‘dissemination’, Deleuze’s ‘rhizomatic growth’ and Irigaray’s ‘efflorescence’ as theoretical models that are, respectively, creatively productive ‘rather than simply investigative or analytical’ (Derrida), non-linear in their genealogy of sources and meanings (Deleuze), and

⁶¹ Miller, *The Vegetative Soul*, pp.11-12.

⁶² Miller, *The Vegetative Soul*, p.191.

⁶³ This cross-referencing process of Miller’s ‘plant-like reading’ corresponds with Julia Kristeva’s notion of ‘intertextuality’. See *Theoretical Contexts*, pp.47-8.

⁶⁴ Miller, *The Vegetative Soul*, p.183.

subversive interpretations of ‘phallogocentric’ texts in order to produce a new feminine subjectivity (Irigaray).⁶⁵

In her discussion of these concepts, Miller accentuates the metonymical fecundity of the ‘plant-like’ text, which frames meaning-making not as something that is already predetermined in the text, but which emerges when heterogeneous ideas, events and objects that are contiguous with, that is, proximate to, the act of reading the text, are embraced as part of the ‘subject matter’ of the text in question. Miller argues, particularly through her analysis of Irigaray’s model of ‘efflorescence’ – a trope, which Miller reminds us, conceptualizes the ‘flowering subject as a sexed subject, a multiple subject, and a subject-in-becoming’⁶⁶ – that the ‘plant-like’ text allows for critical speculation of what is surplus to language and discourse, for example, the epistemological positions available to and/or created by a gendered experiencing subject in an architectural encounter.

Thus, grafting as it is developed in this thesis, extrapolates from Sartiliot and Miller’s work of the floral trope as a point of feminine excess, a node of critical rupture, indicative of a profusion of meanings, inclusive of the repressed surplus which challenges normative masculine codes of knowledge, and emphasizes the sexual difference of the experiencing subject (or the reader in Sartiliot and Miller’s cases) as key to the interpretation and construction of architectural meanings and knowledge.

In this chapter, I have outlined the architectural and physical descriptions of the Palm Court, which I argue, belie the complex meanings it has acquired through its association

⁶⁵ Miller, *The Vegetative Soul*, pp.183-200.

⁶⁶ Miller, *The Vegetative Soul*, p.189, p.198; also pp.188-200.

with Maugham. I conducted a close reading of the intimate detail – the palm tree – and showed that this tropical floral motif may be read, both, as a passive, domesticated object and, as a transgressive detail marked by feminine excess. I developed this feminine excess through the ‘floral plot’ of the Palm Court – the plot being an architectural concept, which enables a critical-creative re-structuring of this garden according to, in this instance, the metonymic concept of ‘grafting’.

The architectural concept of grafting, thus, envisions a gendered interpretation of the Palm Court, and articulates an intimate architectural encounter with Maugham’s brief occupation in the garden, his writing and the details of his life. The following chapter, *A Metonymic Web of the Palm Court*, proposes a metonymic spatial typology, and argues for an architectural understanding of this space through a connective, non-linear, and speculative rhizomatic web, which grafts together a series of spaces, revolving around the Palm Court’s most famous occupant.

flora

2

A Metonymic Web of the Palm Court

Dear Sir,

Thank you for your letter of January 25th, which has just reached me here in Egypt. Of course you have my permission to use the few lines you wish to.

Yours sincerely, W. S. Maugham.¹

In the hotel's museum, there is an amicable letter dated 6 February 1956, from one of its most famous guests. (see Fig.2.1.3) Addressed to hotel's manager in the 1950s, Franz Schutzman, the letter was from English author and playwright William Somerset Maugham. In an earlier conversation with Schutzman, Maugham had made a comment that the Raffles Hotel stood 'for all the fables of the Exotic East'.² The manager saw a potential in this comment and promptly made an application to Maugham, who was then staying at Egypt's Luxor's Winter Palace Hotel, for permission to use it in advertisements for the hotel. Maugham happily granted the manager's request. And until today, this borrowed line has endured as the hotel's most famous testimonial. Yet, the formal association between the writer and the hotel was a belated acknowledgement

¹ Letter from Maugham to the hotel's manager, Franz Schutzman. Reprinted in Liu, *Raffles Hotel* (Singapore: Landmark Books, 1999), p.140. Hereafter, cited as 'Liu, *Raffles Hotel* (1999)'.
² Liu, *Raffles Hotel* (1999), p.142; Roberto Pregarz, *Memories of Raffles: 22 Years With a Grand Old Hotel* (Singapore: Treasury Publishing, 1990), p.52.

since three decades earlier, in the 1920s, Maugham had already been inextricably linked to this hotel as discussed in the previous chapter.³

When Maugham first arrived at the hotel in 1921, he had established himself as a celebrated author and playwright in London, having published several books, including *Liza of Lambeth* (1897), the autobiographical fiction, *Of Human Bondage* (1915) and plays like *Lady Frederick* (1907) and *The Circle* (1921).⁴ During his travels, Maugham took a liking for the tropical landscape of the South Seas, which directly inspired two works – a fictional adaptation of Paul Gauguin's life in Tahiti in *The Moon and Sixpence* (1919) and an anthology of short stories, *The Trembling of a Leaf* (1921). He was also intrigued by the Orient especially China and Hong Kong, which furnished the material for two other novels, *On a Chinese Screen* (1922) and *The Painted Veil* (1925). Maugham also found in Malaya, the Dutch Indies and Borneo, provocative material for good stories.

According to Ilsa Sharp, one of the hotel's historians, Maugham told Sir Malcolm MacDonald, the newly appointed Commissioner-General for Southeast Asia who was heading to Singapore in 1946, that he envied the latter because 'there are more good short stories to be written in Southeast Asia than any other region in the world'.⁵ Maugham himself set quite a number of short stories in this region. Amongst his Malayan-inspired output were two anthologies of short stories – *The Casuarina Tree*⁶ (1926)

³ See *Encountering The Palm Court Through Maugham*, pp.169-73.

⁴ See Raymond Stott, *The Writings of W. Somerset Maugham: A Bibliography* (Alberta: University of Alberta Press, 1973); Anthony Curtis and John Whitehead (eds.), *W. Somerset Maugham: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge, 1997).

⁵ Ilsa Sharp, *There Is Only One Raffles: The Story of a Grand Hotel* (London: Souvenir Press, 1981), p.106.

⁶ *The Casuarina Tree* (1926) contains stories set in the Federated Malay States (FMS), Borneo, and England. Particularly well known is 'The Letter' a tale about blackmail set in FMS. 'The Letter' was successfully

and *Ah King*⁷ (1933), a philosophical novel titled *The Narrow Corner* (1932) and a short story from *The Casuarina Tree* adapted into a play called *The Letter* (1927), about a controversial murder trial held in Singapore during 1911.⁸ Maugham also produced an anecdotal travelogue, *The Gentleman in the Parlour* (1930), which records a journey he took from Rangoon to Haiphong in the winter of 1922-1923.

As literary critic Claude Searcy Melver emphasizes, 'On a quantitative basis, at least half of Maugham's work has been written as a direct result of his travels, and without this part of his work his importance as a writer would certainly be diminished'.⁹ Maugham himself acknowledged that traveling abroad gave him material for his stories,¹⁰ which resulted in a writing life spent largely in transit and shuttling between hotels. While staying at the Raffles Hotel in the 1920s, Maugham used the Palm Court as a writing post. The hotel's historians (Sharp, Gretchen Liu and Raymond Flower) and its previous

adapted into a play in 1927. It was first staged at the Playhouse in London on 24 February 1927 and ran for 338 performances. See Curtis and Whitehead, *The Critical Heritage*, pp.250-4.

⁷ 'The quaint title *Ah King*, attached to these six short stories whose setting is "out from Singapore", is delightfully accounted for by Mr Maugham. In Singapore he hired a self-possessed and singularly aloof young Chinese servant to travel with him – Ah King by name'. Florence Haxton Britten, 'Maugham's Tragic Tales', in *New York Herald Tribune*, 12 November 1933, p.4. Extract reprinted in Curtis and Whitehead, *The Critical Heritage*, pp.204-5. *Ah King* (1933) contains the following stories set in the Federated Malay States: 'Footprints in the Jungle', 'The Door of Opportunity', 'The Book-Bag' and 'The Back of Beyond'; 'Neil MacAdam' is set in Borneo and 'the Vessel of Wrath' is located on an island in the Dutch New Guinea. *Ah King* and *The Casuarina Tree* have since been reissued as: W. Somerset Maugham, *Far Eastern Tales* (London: Vintage, 2000).

⁸ For an investigation into the source of Maugham's 'The Letter', see Norman Sherry's article in *The Observer* 'Crime of Passion: A Real Life Murder That Inspired Somerset Maugham', reprinted in *The Sunday Times* (Timescope Feature Section), 30 May 1976.

⁹ Claude Searcy Melver, *William Somerset Maugham: A Study of Technique and Literary Sources* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1936), p.35.

¹⁰ W. S. Maugham, *The Gentleman in the Parlour: A Record of a Journey from Rangoon to Haiphong* (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1930).

manager (Roberto Pregarz) have speculated that Maugham's use of the Palm Court may have been less placid, in that the writer sat in the garden to revise his short stories and according to one historian, possibly to pick up gossip from expatriates who socialized at the hotel.¹¹ It was the experience of writing *The Casuarina Tree*, six tales set in and around the Federated Malay States with its rich cast of British administrators living in the region – government servants, officers, planters and tin miners with their wives and mistresses – that encouraged Maugham's lifelong appetite for seeking out fictional material in the Far East, to the effect that he made travel to these regions an almost annual affair thereafter.¹²

Altogether Maugham made three visits to the Raffles Hotel, the first one in 1921, returning in 1925 and 1959. With its reliable supply of imported provisions familiar to the foreign expatriate or traveler, and efficient business, communication and transport links to London, Singapore was a convenient base for British travelers who had plans to visit neighbouring countries in the 1920s.¹³ During his visits, Maugham took a room

¹¹ The speculation about gossip is suggested by Flower, who writes in a caption to an image of the Palm Court, 'The idyllic Palm Court setting of Raffles where world-renowned writers penned their books and other luminaries exchanged gossip and ideas'. See Raymond Flower, *Year of the Tiger* (Singapore: Times Books International, 1986), p.13. For a discussion on the hotel's commissioned histories and independent research relating Maugham to the Palm Court, see *Encountering The Palm Court Through Maugham*, pp.169-71.

¹² Maugham visited the South Sea islands in 1916 with the American Gerald Haxton, who later became Maugham's lover, secretary and traveling partner to the Far East. Maugham met Haxton while working as an interpreter near the French Front during the First World War. For Maugham's biography, see for example, Robert Calder, *Willie: The Life of W. Somerset Maugham* (London: Heinemann, 1989); Bryan Connon, *Somerset Maugham and the Maugham Dynasty* (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1997); Anthony Curtis, *The Pattern of Maugham: A Critical Portrait* (London: Hamilton, 1974). Calder offers a sympathetic interpretation of the writer's life, Curtis reads Maugham's life in parallel with the writer's fictional themes, while Connon discusses the writer's relationship to his family.

¹³ Susan Morgan, *Place Matters: Gendered Geography in Victorian Women's Travel Books About Southeast Asia* (New Brunswick, N. J.: Rutgers University Press, 1996), pp.45-8. By the time of Maugham's first visit, the hotel itself was modernized with its own bakery, slaughterhouse and cold storage, equipped with government

overlooking the Palm Court, originally numbered Suite 77 (now renumbered room 102), but better known as the Somerset Maugham Suite. During his stay, the writer adopted the Palm Court as a makeshift study. Maugham established a strict pattern, spending the mornings writing until just before lunch.¹⁴ Sharp mentions that during Maugham's final stay in 1959, the room boy assigned to Maugham, one Ho Wee How, remembers he was tasked to place 'the author's chair ... in the garden each morning, and he would steadily write until lunchtime'.¹⁵

Nevertheless, the association between the hotel and Maugham perpetuated through anecdotal evidence – a throwaway line from Maugham about the hotel standing 'all the fables of the Exotic East' eagerly picked up by a shrewd manager, and popular knowledge of the writer's working habit in the Palm Court – has had no critical import on its architectural discussions. This attitude is evident in the hotel's own historical monographs, which clearly consider the Maugham association as no more than trivia. Subsequently, while never failing to implicate Maugham in descriptions of the Palm Court, any material on Maugham is ultimately separated from specific architectural descriptions made of the Palm Court and of the hotel.¹⁶ At the same time, contemporary architectural perceptions of the hotel are primarily shaped by the hotel's association to

telegraph and post office on the premises, a large motor garage, a darkroom for amateur photographers, and also ran, albeit briefly, its own dairy farm. See Liu, *Raffles Hotel* (2006), p.53

¹⁴ Liu, *Raffles Hotel* (1999), p.101.

¹⁵ In the first half of the twentieth century, it was customary for guests to be assigned their own 'boy' for the duration of their stay. See Sharp, *There Is Only One Raffles*, p.108; Pregarz, *Memories of Raffles*, p.53.

¹⁶ Of the four historical monographs, Liu's two versions (1999 and 2006) have dedicated sections to discussing the architectural features of the hotel. Here, the pattern of separating 'trivia' on Maugham from architectural descriptions of the Palm Court and the hotel is most pronounced.

Maugham's 'Exotic East' and a general interest in the writer's presence in the Palm Court, a historical connection, which present hotel staff are primed to divulge to guests.¹⁷

I proposed earlier that this experiencing subject's architectural encounter with the Palm Court has been conducted through an intimate encounter with Maugham, specifically through knowledge of his stories and an interest in his writing life. The problem is that this architectural encounter is unaccounted for by the hotel's emergent architectural history and in its role as a National Monument, which as discussed earlier, is primarily architect-centred.¹⁸ Consequently, the architectural value of Maugham's fiction and biographical details remain unrealized. This chapter takes on the challenge of producing an innovative architectural interpretation of the Palm Court drawing on such material.

Grafting the Palm Court: The Metonymic Web, The 'Exotic East' and Maugham

To understand the architectural import of the Palm Court's literary connection, the links between Maugham, the Palm Court, his fiction, his writing life and his notion of the 'Exotic East', which have until now been considered by the hotel's historians and also in the hotel's emergent architectural history as trivia, and thus, distinctly separated from proper architectural discussions, demand a relational architectural configuration. The emphasis is on a metonymic relationship, that is, an interpretation of the Palm Court in

¹⁷ In the hotel's private archives, there is a file of historical facts, prepared by Liu, for the current hotel staff. It lists a set of important questions and historical facts, which are key to the hotel and should be known by the staff. Details of Maugham's writing habit in the Palm Court and the room he occupied are amongst the items on this list.

¹⁸ For the hotel's emergent architectural history, see *Empirical Contexts*, pp.99-109.

the context of, and in association with, a network of spaces related to Maugham. This proposed metonymic web of spaces is associated with the garden not through similarity between the spaces by way of architectural form or function, but rather through their shared link to Maugham. In particular, this proposition explores the Palm Court through Maugham's conception of the 'Exotic East', the ubiquitous description which binds Maugham with this hotel. I interpret the 'Exotic East' through three key themes present in Maugham's exotic fiction and his biographical details, namely, intoxication, gossip and masculine self-definition. I also propose that these themes were articulated by the writer through a series of spaces, which include the opium den, the parlour and the study. In this architectural interpretation, these themes and spaces constitute the Palm Court's metonymic web.

Although the suggested spaces are located ostensibly outside the Palm Court, I argue that they are central to an intimate encounter with the Palm Court because these spaces are key, firstly, to an understanding of Maugham's 'exotic fiction' – a description the writer used to articulate the stories set in tropical or oriental Asia (which in Maugham's literary repertoire included the Federated States of Malaya, North Borneo, the Dutch Indies, China, Hong Kong and India) and the South Pacific.¹⁹ And secondly, because these spaces contextualized Maugham's writing practice. These associative spaces are read in conjunction with the Palm Court through what I call an 'architectural time-out-of-joint', that is, my interpretation offers one possible composition of how the Palm Court might be understood, where myriad subjects (the architectural subject of the tropical garden, this experiencing subject, and Maugham), times (Maugham's biographical life, this

¹⁹ For a critical outline of Maugham's Oriental exotic fiction, see Philip Holden, *Orienting Masculinity, Orienting Nation: W. Somerset Maugham's Exotic Fiction* (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1996), pp.21-3; p.25 (see footnote No.3).

experiencing subject's contemporary present, the garden's historical past and its present day condition), and spaces (the Palm Court, the opium den, the parlour and the study), converge in an intimate encounter.

This web is constructed through the architectural concept of 'grafting', which as reiterated in the previous chapter, stitches together what is central to an intimate encounter with the Palm Court but excessive to the hotel's emergent architectural histories – namely, Maugham's writing routine in the Palm Court and the notion of the 'Exotic East' ascribed by him to the hotel. A metonymic connection is based on unlikely connections between objects (including spaces and people), ideas or contexts, which may be linked together through a common denominator, in this case, Maugham. This metonymic web is thus, surplus to a conventional architectural interpretation of the Palm Court, which might focus, for example, on a formal analysis.

As discussed earlier following Kaja Silverman's argument, metonymic relationships explore repressed or absent relationships, by revealing how 'one terms stands for another to which it is in some way contiguous'.²⁰ Through the proposed web, I will argue that the aspect key to Maugham's 'Exotic East', and hence, to an architectural interpretation of the Palm Court, lies in the repressed notion of feminine excess. As the discussion on the palm tree in the previous chapter iterates, the feminine has been symbolically linked to the tropical landscape as a passive and contained aspect.²¹ However, through a close reading of Maugham's fiction and biographical details, I will attempt in this chapter, to

²⁰ Kaja Silverman, *The Subject of Semiotics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp.113-4. See also *An Architecture of Intimate Encounter*, pp.147-50.

²¹ See *Encountering The Palm Court Through Maugham*, pp.183-94.

rehabilitate feminine excess as a subversive factor, and offer a gendered interpretation of the Palm Court through this line of argument.

Developing literary critic Philip Holden's interpretation, I understand Maugham's 'Exotic East' as an ideological spatial concept premised on, yet repressive of, feminine excess. In his study of Maugham's Oriental fiction, Holden proposes that the notion of the 'Exotic East' should be interpreted as part of a 'constructed, discursive and ideological nature of Maugham's East'.²² He argues that there are two Orientalist tropes at play in Maugham's East. The first trope is the binary opposition suggested in Edward Said's *Orientalism*, where the West is represented by a fully-formed masculine subject, who is rational, objective and progressive, and the East is conversely represented as feminine, irrational, sensual and archaic.²³ The second trope reflects Holden's own critique of present literary interpretations on Maugham's work, which Holden argues are conducted mostly through the Saidian binaries.²⁴ Holden's second trope suggests that the Western colonial subject is dialectically constructed in relation to the East, that is to say the positions of West as masculine and East as feminine are not *a priori* but symbolically constructed such that the masculinity of the colonial subject is ideologically reliant on the constructed femininity of the 'Exotic East'. Holden gives an example where Said mentions Maugham as one of many 'literary sex tourists' who came to the East in search of 'sexual experience unobtainable in Europe'.²⁵ In this example, Maugham the colonial subject, is implicated in the 'Other' that his own fiction and colonial society distances.

²² Holden, *Orienteering Masculinity*, *Orienteering Nation*, p.25.

²³ Edward Said, 'Orientalism Reconsidered', in Francis Barker (ed.), *Literature, Politics, and Theory: Papers from the Essex Conference*, 1976-84 (London: Methuen, 1986), pp.210-29; here p.225, cited by Holden, *Orienteering Masculinity*, *Orienteering Nation*, p.16.

²⁴ Holden, *Orienteering Masculinity*, *Orienteering Nation*, pp.17-18.

²⁵ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Vintage Books, 1999), p.190, cited by Holden, *Orienteering Masculinity*, *Orienteering Nation*, pp.17-18.

These two tropes, that is, the separation of, and conversely, the active participation of the East, in the construction of Western colonial masculinity, are central to my own associative interpretation of the Palm Court through an intimate encounter with Maugham.

Holden also argues that the 'Exotic East' is central to Maugham's ideologically driven fiction, which the former describes as stories controversially occupying the space of scandal, for example, played out through fictional themes of incest, misogyny, crimes of passion and subdued homoeroticism,²⁶ so that Maugham appeared to be endorsing a shared system of imperial values, and maintaining a 'harmonious' alignment with what was acceptable and what was not in colonial society.²⁷ In developing these fictional themes, for example inter-racial love affairs, incest and murder, Maugham concentrated on subjects which were frowned upon by colonial society but as the narrator of these stories, he placed himself outside of what postcolonial critic Homi Bhabha calls the 'conflictual positions that constitute the subject in colonial discourse'.²⁸

As Holden observes, 'The creation of the Maugham narrator seems very much to be a device to keep Maugham himself securely closeted' and 'Maugham's oriental fictions are successful participants in the creation, and in the reproduction, of imperial ideology'.²⁹ Consequently, through his fiction, Maugham who was a closet homosexual, occupied a

²⁶ Examples of Maugham's fiction and themes include *The Narrow Corner* (homophobia and camaraderie amongst men); 'Neil Macadam' in *Far Eastern Tales*, pp.184-239 (misogyny); 'The Book-Bag', in *The Nonesuch Storytellers: W. Somerset Maugham* (London: The Nonesuch Press, 1990), pp.615-64 (incest).

²⁷ Holden, *Orienting Masculinity, Orienting Nation*, p.3.

²⁸ Homi Bhabha, 'Difference, Discrimination and the Discourse of Colonialism', in Francis Barker (ed.), *The Politics of Theory* (Colchester: University of Essex, 1983), p.142, cited by Holden, *Orienting Masculinity, Orienting Nation*, p.17.

²⁹ Holden, *Orienting Masculinity, Orienting Nation*, p.2, p.3.

strategic position, which exempted his own self from critical scrutiny. In response to this blind spot, Holden suggests that critical interpretations of Maugham's 'Exotic East' and colonial sexuality should be read 'affirmatively' against the grain of colonial society's and Maugham's own denial of his homosexuality.³⁰

The naïve relationship between Maugham and the hotel is enabled by an omnipresent colonial epistemological structure, which simultaneously enforces and censures conducts, discourses, spaces and subjects deviant of the colonial status quo.³¹ The suppression of taboo issues, for example, homosexuality, which also did not feature explicitly in Maugham's work has resulted in a lack of critical contemporary literary accounts which explore the instrumentality of Maugham's exotic fiction and his construction of colonial masculinity.³² Consequently, details of Maugham's private life as a homosexual and speculations about his frequent visits to the East to escape familial responsibilities have not been critically analyzed in literary terms, much less architecturally mapped onto the spaces he fictionally created or physically gravitated towards.

I bring up Holden's argument³³ since it is one of the few critical texts on Maugham that links the writer's construction of the 'Exotic East' with 'imaginative geography, gender, sexuality, and ... Maugham's lone triumphant creation, "W. Somerset Maugham, world-

³⁰ Holden, *Orienting Masculinity, Orienting Nation*, p.2.

³¹ For biographical inconsistencies and colonial literary criticism's silence on Maugham's sexuality, see Holden, *Orienting Masculinity, Orienting Nation*, pp.4-6, pp.9-10. For an overview of Maugham's Malayan fiction, see Anthony Burgess, 'Introduction', in W. Somerset Maugham, *Maugham's Malayan Stories* (Kuala Lumpur: Heinemann, 1975), pp.vi-xvii.

³² Holden, *Orienting Masculinity, Orienting Nation*, pp.4-11.

³³ Holden argues for a literary interpretation of Maugham's work against our contemporary knowledge of the writer's repressed homosexual life, which Holden asserts, is an aspect that has ultimately given shape to Maugham's writing, 'There is a clear connection in Maugham's works between manner of narration and masculine self-fashioning'. See Holden, *Orienting Masculinity, Orienting Nation*, p.9.

weary, world-traveler, whose narrative first person became the best known and least wearisome in the world””.³⁴ From the hotel’s emergent architectural histories, its status as a National Monument and the monument’s unproblematic adoption of Maugham’s ‘Exotic East’, issues of gender and sexuality, which were blind spots in colonial literary discourse and colonial architectural discourse, are still neglected by contemporary architectural discourse today. This oversight is arguably due to the intransigence of Maugham’s patriarchal values today, particularly in the framework of nationalist discourse. As Holden observes:

The discursive power of Maugham’s vision of colonial society, however, is harder to shift, since it is complicit with constructions of *masculinity and nation* which underpin not only contemporary British political discourse but also that of Singapore.³⁵

Developing Holden’s gendered literary perspective on Maugham’s exotic fiction, this chapter thus re-interprets the Palm Court through a gendered reading of Maugham’s ‘Exotic East’, which in itself, opens up a perspective currently neglected by the hotel’s colonial architectural history, and under-examined by the Southeast Asian architectural context, which as previously discussed, emphasizes national self-definition.

As Holden’s interpretation shows, the writer who piques my interest, was altogether a more complex and controversial subject than the figure represented by colonial literary

³⁴ Gore Vidal, ‘Maugham’s Half and Half,’ Review of *Willie* by Robert Calder, in *New York Review of Books* (1 Feb, 1990), v.37, n.1, p.40, cited by Holden, *Orienting Masculinity, Orienting Nation*, p.5.

³⁵ Holden, *Orienting Masculinity, Orienting Nation*, p.4. Emphasis mine.

criticism,³⁶ and the hotel's colonial history, where the writer has been portrayed as one of the heterosexual, masculine, colonial figures normatively associated with the hotel's expatriate community of colonial planters, hunters, tin miners, explorers, government administrators, army officers and businessmen in the 1920s and the 1930s.³⁷ Born in Paris in 1874, Maugham was sent to England at the age of nine after his parents died. He was a medical doctor by training but a novelist and playwright by profession.³⁸ Aside from writing, Maugham served as a spy in Switzerland and Russia for the British secret intelligence during the First World War.³⁹ In 1917 at the age of forty-four, Maugham married a London socialite, divorcee and later celebrity interior designer Syrie Barnado, with whom he had a daughter.⁴⁰ (Fig.2.2.1) The couple divorced in 1928. While married, Maugham maintained a relationship with secretary and fellow partner in travel to the East, an American called Gerald Haxton, whom Maugham met while serving the British ambulance service in Geneva during the First World War.⁴¹

³⁶ For example, Holden discusses literary and biographical representations of Maugham, which intentionally sidestep the writer's attitudes towards gender and race, and elude the issue of homosexuality that was 'the unmentionable invisible presence that centres the urbane circumference of his work'. Holden, *Orienting Masculinity, Orienting Nation*, p.4, pp.5-9.

³⁷ See for example, Liu, *Raffles Hotel* (2006), pp.46-7, p.73; Sharp, *There is Only One Raffles*, pp.18-19, p.108.

³⁸ Calder, *Willie*, pp.36-55; Arpan K. Banarjee, 'William Somerset Maugham: Medical Student at St Thomas's Hospital 1892 to 1897 – *Liza of Lambeth*', in *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine* (January 1989), v.82, pp.44-5.

³⁹ See Calder, *Willie*, pp.135-6, pp.145-50; Calder, *Quest for Freedom*, 273-89.

⁴⁰ Syrie Barnardo (1879-1955), daughter of Dr Thomas Barnardo (who established the Barnardo homes for destitute orphans) was formerly married to Henry Wellcome, the founder of the pharmaceutical company, Burroughs, Wellcome and Company. She broke up with Wellcome, and the acrimonious lawsuit between them involved Syrie's relationship with Maugham, which in itself was complicated. On Syrie's relationship with Maugham, see Calder, *Willie*, pp.123-50; Connon, *Somerset Maugham*, pp.56-70. On Syrie's career as the 'White Lady' (a nickname given to Syrie for her magnolia complexion and her popular all-white interiors), see Calder, *Willie*, pp.188-90; Connon, *Somerset Maugham*, pp.73-5. For a discussion from Syrie's perspective, see Gerald McKnight, *The Scandal of Syrie Maugham* (London: W. H. Allen, 1980).

⁴¹ See Calder *Willie*, pp.130-1; pp.138-41; Connon, *Somerset Maugham*, pp.169-77.



2.2.1 Maugham with Syrie, 1929.

Even though Maugham's fiction observed colonial values, his books were notorious enough to warrant an order from Lady Clementi, wife of the Governor of the Straits Settlement based in Singapore in the 1930s, Sir Cecil Clementi (1929-1934), requesting for their immediate removal from the library shelves on the grounds of their 'immorality'.⁴² An angry report in the local Singapore newspapers further suggested that Maugham had embellished unauthorized gossip:

It is interesting to try to analyze the prejudice against Somerset Maugham which is so intense and widespread in this part of the world. The usual explanation is

⁴² This order was made by Lady Clementi, wife of Sir Cecil Clementi, who was the Governor of the Straits Settlement (comprising Singapore, Penang and Malacca) between 1929 and 1934. Cited in Yoke-Sum Wong, 'So Small A Community', published in: <http://www.lancs.ac.uk/fss/sociology/staff/wong/vanda%20miss%20joaquim.doc>. (Accessed on 2 September 2005).

that Mr Maugham picks up some local scandal at an outstation and dishes it up as a short story ... the second cause is disgust at the way Mr Maugham has explained the worst and the least representative aspects of the European life in Malaya – murder, cowardice, drink, seduction, adultery... always the same cynical emphasis on the same unpleasant things. No wonder that white men and women who are living normal lives in Malaya wish that Mr Maugham would look for local colour elsewhere.⁴³

The opprobrium Maugham caused through his fiction was far from feeble. Victor Purcell, a former British civil servant in Malaya in the 1930s, accused Maugham of abusing the hospitality of his hosts by ‘ferreting out the family skeletons of his hosts and putting them into his books’.⁴⁴ Other critics suggested that Maugham was a misogynist writer from the way women were portrayed in his stories.⁴⁵ These complaints drew away from his controversial double life – on the one hand, a colonial gentleman of letters in public, and on the other, a closet homosexual in private – a point which is relevant to this architectural interpretation since I will argue that Maugham’s duplicity was reflected in the ‘exotic’ spaces he occupied and created through his fiction.

⁴³ Editorial piece featured in *Straits Budget*, Singapore, 7 June, 1938. Cited in Mukesh Ranjan Verma, *The Alien Land: The Orient and William Somerset Maugham* (New Delhi: Janaki Prakashan, 2000), pp.19-20.

⁴⁴ Victor Purcell, *Memoirs of a Malayan Official* (London: Cassell, 1965), p.271, cited by Sherry, ‘Crime of Passion’.

⁴⁵ See for example, Anne Armstrong’s review of *The Narrow Corner* in Anne Armstrong, ‘Review’, in *Saturday Review* (26 November 1932, London), CLIV, pp.564-5. Extract reprinted in Curtis and Whitehead, *The Critical Heritage*, p.200. See also Holden, *Orienting Masculinity, Orienting Nation*, p.7.

‘That was a good evening’s work. Now we’ll burn everything you’ve hidden under the ss-ofa’.⁴⁶ Maugham’s obsession for burying his tracks resulted in ‘bonfire nights’, which were held every so often towards the end of his life, ‘in which vast quantities of manuscripts and letters were committed to the flames’.⁴⁷ One of Maugham’s biographers, Robert Calder laments that ‘an accurate rendering of Maugham’s life’ was ‘an elusive matter’ since in 1957, Maugham ‘... published a request that all his friends destroy any correspondence from him, and in 1958 he burned practically all his papers, notes, letters, fragments and unpublished material’.⁴⁸

Perhaps anxious about posthumous revelations of his unorthodox married life, Maugham was determined to fashion his self-image solely through his role as a professional author of books. It is through Maugham’s fictional alter egos that his elusive personality has been habitually pursued in literary discourse.⁴⁹ For example, Holden argues that Maugham’s seemingly detached narration in most of his fiction is more complex than it appears since it endows him with a heterosexual, masculine façade:

Maugham’s novels and short stories always foreground the process of composition: most of Maugham’s narratives are either doctors or writers and the act of narration is presented in clinical, quasi-scientific terms. Furthermore, the values attached to narration in Maugham’s fiction – objectivity, irony, control and emotional continence – are all normatively masculine values. Through the act of writing, and through his fiction’s constant recreation of the figure ‘W.

⁴⁶ This statement by Maugham is recollected by the writer’s secretary, Alan Searle. Curtis, *The Pattern of Maugham*, p.10.

⁴⁷ Curtis, *The Pattern of Maugham*, p.10.

⁴⁸ Calder, *Willie*, p.1.

⁴⁹ Holden, *Orienting Masculinity, Orienting Nation*, pp.9-10.

Somerset Maugham', narrator, Maugham creates a heterosexual, masculine, public persona.⁵⁰

According to literary critic Anthony Curtis, amongst the fictional personae that Maugham favoured was the figure of the 'Departer'.⁵¹ Maugham had picked up this itinerant motif from one of his favourite books, an English translation of *The Thousand and One Nights*, which he started reading as a boy in his uncle's home in Whitstable.⁵² The writer found himself immersed in the story's peripatetic protagonist who could escape his own fate by travelling.⁵³ Significantly, space played a key role in the Departers' scheme as he could only transform his destiny by remaining mobile, thus binding the sense of self to the vicissitudes of itinerant spaces.

The Departers typically sought exotic and distant spaces, far removed from the 'drawing-room' taste and culture around which Maugham's Edwardian London revolved. In literary criticism, surprisingly little has been discussed concerning the influence of spatial settings on Maugham's narrative perceptions and, reciprocally, how knowledge of these spaces might affect the reader's understanding of Maugham's texts.⁵⁴ This aspect is central to the present architectural inquiry. Here, I am concerned not so much with a

⁵⁰ Holden, *Orienting Masculinity, Orienting Nation*, pp.151-2.

⁵¹ Curtis, *The Pattern of Maugham*, pp.30-2.

⁵² For Maugham's childhood at Whitstable, see Calder, *Willie*, pp.14-23; Connon, *Somerset Maugham*, pp.10-14; Robert Calder, *W. Somerset Maugham and The Quest For Freedom* (London: Heinemann, 1972), pp.4-5.

⁵³ Curtis, *The Pattern of Maugham*, p.31.

⁵⁴ The references to geography and place are secondary to the literary analysis. For more relevant examples, see Klaus W. Jonas, 'Maugham and the East' in Klaus W. Jonas (ed.), *The World of Somerset Maugham* (London: Peter Owen Ltd., 1959), pp.96-141 and Holden, *Orienting Masculinity, Orienting Nation*, pp.5-23. Other titles promise but fail to address the link between space and plot, for example, Verma, *The Alien Land*, B. N. Singh, *William Somerset Maugham* (Delhi: Ajanta, 2001) and M. V. Ramana, *Maugham and the East* (New Delhi: Minerva Press, 2001).

literary interpretation of Maugham's textual creation of selfhood as I am with how this creation developed in relation to particular spaces associated with the writer. In this sense, the Departer is a key figure, who enables the narration, and sustains the imaginative topography of Maugham's 'Exotic East'.

Travel, as is well known by now, was obligatory for Maugham and did not only provide new material for his fiction. Travel enabled him to invent another self. Maugham commented that this inner self could only take place in spaces and conditions not subject to social scrutiny. He confirmed that he traveled because:

... I like to move from place to place, I enjoy the sense of freedom it gives me, it pleases me to be rid of the ties, responsibilities, duties ... I am often tired of myself and I have a notion that by travel I can add to my personality and so change myself a little. I do not bring back from a journey quite the same self that I took.⁵⁵

Although outwardly, Maugham was perceived as the archetypal Englishman, he was born in Paris and chose to live most of his life in a kind of permanent exile, travelling almost all the time and eventually settling in Villa Mauresque in Cap Ferrat, Southern France.⁵⁶ Maugham, the Edwardian doctor turned writer and playwright, inveterate traveler, part-time husband, debonair spy-master and secret homosexual, epitomized a figure riddled with contradictions. I suggest it is through the Departer that all these different selves were given space to emerge, and notably, such a space was found in Maugham's 'Exotic East'.

⁵⁵ Maugham, *The Gentleman in the Parlour*, p.12.

⁵⁶ For Maugham's house Villa Mauresque at Cap Ferrat, see Calder, *Willie*, pp.203-8.

While the writer is associated with other Southeast Asian hotels for example, The Strand in Burma and The Oriental in Bangkok, I do not propose that the Maugham encounter in each of these hotels are congruent. The proposed metonymic web grafts a speculative archive for the Palm Court by conducting a close reading of select texts linked to Maugham's notion of the 'Exotic East', a description the writer himself bestows on this hotel. These texts include fiction (*The Narrow Corner* and *The Letter*), travel notes (*The Gentleman in the Parlour*), autobiographical fiction (*Of Human Bondage*) and biographical accounts of the writer. The choice of texts relates to the spaces explored in this web, that is, the opium den, the parlour and the study. Although not of architectural origin, I suggest that these texts are key to understanding Maugham's role in an intimate encounter with the Palm Court. I attempt to extend literary interpretations of this writer by reading these literary texts against architectural spaces such that a discussion of architectural space becomes key for understanding Maugham's 'Exotic East', and hence, crucial also, for understanding his exotic fiction and peripatetic writing life.

In my interpretation, Maugham's fiction (a category which also includes, in this case, his travelogue)⁵⁷ and biographical accounts on him have been presented as distinctly separate as possible. Through these fictional and biographical threads, I explore Maugham's 'Exotic East' in relation to a geographical area covering Malaya, the Straits Settlement, the Dutch Indies and Borneo. The first point in this metonymic web begins with Maugham who wrote exotic fiction in the Palm Court, and who declared that the

⁵⁷ Maugham's travelogue does not give the traveler precise information about his travel destinations. Rather, a travelogue like *The Gentleman in The Parlour* is more atmospheric in quality, written for Maugham's 'own diversion', where he makes references to an array of interesting spaces and people, unencumbered by any aim of providing accurate travel information. See a review of this travelogue published in the *Times Literary Supplement*, 20 March 1930, p.230, reprinted in Curtis and Whitehead, *The Critical Heritage*, pp.180-1.

Raffles Hotel, 'stands for all the fables of the Exotic East'. Three other spaces, that is, the opium den, the parlour and the study, are grafted to this first point, with the discussion of each space developing around the writer's notion of the 'Exotic East' articulated through the themes of intoxication, gossip and masculine self-definition. I will argue that these themes and spaces are key to Maugham's knowledge, perception and representation of the East, and thus, central to an architectural interpretation of the Palm Court, which is so closely associated with this writer and his exotic fiction.

Intoxication and the Opium Den (with the Hothouse)

In Holden's critical examination of Maugham's final book – the philosophical-murder-crime novel *The Narrow Corner* (1932) located in fictional Kanda, a Dutch Indies island east of Singapore – Holden brings up two points, which I wish to expand in relation to the Palm Court. The first is the space of the opium den, suggested by the novel's main character who is an opium addict, and the second is the proposition of intoxication as an Exotic Eastern theme, which permeates Maugham's fictional tropical landscape, in this case, the island of Kanda.⁵⁸ Through Holden's study, I explore a connection between Maugham's opium den and the writer's descriptions of Kanda's tropical landscape, and speculate on how the spatial quality of Maugham's opium den may be grafted into the Palm Court's metonymic web. In short, how does the space of intoxication, according to this writer, operate, and what are its architectural meanings?

⁵⁸ Holden, *Orienting Masculinity, Orienting Nation*, pp.115-30.

In *The Narrow Corner*, a novel which Maugham researched during his second trip to Malaya and the Raffles Hotel in 1925, the opium den is the scene, which supports the mild addiction and nomadic experience of its main character. Some background of this character, the orientalist and decadent opium addict, Dr Saunders, is necessary to contextualize the architectural discussion of Maugham's opium den. As Holden observes, Maugham seems to openly sympathize with this character.⁵⁹ Saunders is an exiled British physician, who is introduced to the reader in the opening pages of the story as someone trusted by the Chinese who 'knew he smoked opium' but ostracized by British members of the club he frequents only 'to read the papers when the mail came in'.⁶⁰ Saunders is clearly modeled after the Departure, and for some literary critics, this character bore an uncanny resemblance to Maugham who was also a doctor himself, 'The novelist puts so much of himself into Dr Saunders that *The Narrow Corner* might well be considered with the autobiographical novels'.⁶¹ Here, the literary critic Richard Cordell refers to Maugham's autobiographical fiction, *Of Human Bondage* (1915), which was modeled closely after the writer's own life.

After a previous stint in London's Harley Street, Saunders uproots to China, where he sets up a successful practice in Fu-Chou. He is a hedonist and a man of ambiguous sexual orientation. Suspiciously struck off the medical register and known to have an opium addiction, which allied him morally, to degenerate types and socially, to the Chinese who were despised by the colonials for their reliance on opium, Holden suggests

⁵⁹ Holden, *Orienting Masculinity, Orienting Nation*, p.124.

⁶⁰ W. Somerset Maugham, *The Narrow Corner* (London: Heinemann, 1979), p.3.

⁶¹ Richard A. Cordell, *Somerset Maugham: A Writer for All Seasons A Biographical and Critical Study* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969), p.146. See also Holden, *Orienting Masculinity, Orienting Nation*, pp.124-9.

that the doctor's marginalized position in relation to the European community allowed the latter to infiltrate into this Other community.⁶²

Holden argues that opium and intoxication are fundamental to Saunders' grasp of the East, 'Intoxication, the closet turned inside out, seems to stand for the East; as addict, Saunders thus gains an authority to speak'.⁶³ The moral body that was at risk of contamination by 'foreign substances', included both the sexualized body of the individual and the body of the state, as drugs were ingested into the physiological body and physically brought in from exotic places like India and China.

Literary critic Jeffrey Weeks elaborates that the term 'addict' was linked to 'the activities of a man charged with male prostitution in the 1860s'.⁶⁴ Using Weeks's definition of 'addict', Holden connects Saunders' opium addiction to another repressed sexualized subject, the homosexual, and points out that late nineteenth and early twentieth-century discourse concerning drug addiction linked addiction not just to moral decadence but also to moral impurity, harmful both to the (hetero)sexual body and to national vitality.⁶⁵ Vitality, it is 'Saunders's surrender (of his body) to intoxication of the conglomerate East

⁶² Holden, *Orienting Masculinity, Orienting Nation*, p.128. Opium was used by the British to subjugate the Chinese in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Malaya. For a history of opium addiction and subjugation in Singapore, see Morgan, *Place Matters*, pp.41-5; Carl Trocki, *Opium and Empire: Chinese Society in Colonial Singapore, 1800-1910* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990).

⁶³ Holden, *Orienting Masculinity, Orienting Nation*, pp.128.

⁶⁴ Jeffrey Weeks, 'Inverts, Perverts and Mary-Annes: Male Prostitution and the Regulation of Homosexuality in England in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries', in *Journal of Homosexuality* (Fall-Winter 1980-1), v.6, n.1-2, p.116, cited by Holden, *Orienting Masculinity, Orienting Nation*, p.125.

⁶⁵ See Holden, *Orienting Masculinity, Orienting Nation*, pp.125-6.

gives him both an inside knowledge and a space nominally outside the progressive narrative of the West, a space in which he uses to full effect'.⁶⁶

Similarly, the island of Kanda visited by Saunders, is 'figured in terms of intoxication, a space which overwhelms masculine attempts to make it signify',⁶⁷ an unruly landscape shaped by feminine artifice, 'so bizarre and sophisticated' that it seemingly belonged more to 'art rather than to nature'.⁶⁸ At the centre of this ambiguous landscape is a beautiful young woman called Louise, daughter of a widowed plantation owner, and the common love interest of two young men, who attempt to assert their masculinity by possessing Louise. However, both men fail and they are subsequently driven to their own suicides. It is in relation to Louise's 'semiotically slippery'⁶⁹ femininity, portrayed in the story as an excessive quality both alluring and threatening, that the two male subjects of the novel, Erik and Fred, struggle for masculine self-definition. In the story, Louise is described as fair and European but also part of the tropical landscape, for example, she is, on one occasion, clothed in a green silk native *sarong*, which wound seductively around her lithe and androgynous body. She is said to have resembled one of the ladies in the Sultan's harem and smelled sweetly of a perfume 'languorous and illusive, and it was pleasant to surmise that it was made from a secret recipe in the palace of one of the *rajahs* of the islands'.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Holden, *Orienting Masculinity, Orienting Nation*, p.124.

⁶⁷ Holden, *Orienting Masculinity, Orienting Nation*, p.115.

⁶⁸ Maugham, *The Narrow Corner*, p.100, cited by Holden, *Orienting Masculinity, Orienting Nation*, p.118. Holden's citations are from the 1932 edition of Maugham's book.

⁶⁹ Holden, *Orienting Masculinity, Orienting Nation*, p.115.

⁷⁰ Maugham, *The Narrow Corner*, pp.127-8, cited by Holden, *Orienting Masculinity, Orienting Nation*, p.123.

To be intoxicated in this case, is to possess feminine ambiguity and artifice, a feminine excess that is ‘semiotically slippery’ – personified in the seductive figure of Louise, and in Saunders, whose decadent body has been softened and feminized by opium addiction. Both Louise and Saunders are excluded in the social order defined by Western heterosexual masculinity, and yet both have access to power – Saunders is trusted by the Chinese and Louise is desired by men – which lie outside the grasp of their male counterparts. Thus, the notion of intoxication here indicates a condition of feminine excess, which is supplemental but also transgressive and strategically ambiguous so that, like Saunders and Louise, it becomes possible to liberate oneself from society’s norms. Holden reminds us that the opium den was a common literary trope in the first quarter of the twentieth century, that it marked an ambiguous zone of transgression and encapsulated ‘a suspension of morality within an imaginary, domesticated Orient’.⁷¹ Maugham’s own description of an opium den in one of his travel notebooks, *On a Chinese Screen* (1922), is similarly marked by ambiguity, described as being both unfamiliar, ‘dimly lit ... low and squalid’, ‘mysterious’, populated by exotic figures like ‘a pig-tailed Chinaman’ who is ‘aloof and saturnine’ but at the same time, also ‘a cheerful spot, comfortable, homelike, and cosy’.⁷²

In Maugham’s story, the opium den is depicted as a spatial supplement, which subversively attaches itself to more legitimate architectural spaces. For example, the first space Maugham introduces in the story is Saunders’ respectable consulting-room and

⁷¹ Holden, *Orienting Masculinity, Orienting Nation*, p.126.

⁷² W. Somerset Maugham, ‘On A Chinese Screen’, in *The Travel Books of W. Somerset Maugham* (London: Heinemann, 1955), p.37. When I refer to Maugham’s description of the opium den, I use his story published in this 1955 anthology. Maugham himself experimented with opium on his first visit to Singapore in 1921 and had a pleasant ‘opium dream’ where he drifted amongst the trees towards the sea, but afterwards suffered a debilitating headache. See Calder, *Willie*, pp.166-7.

parlour, which is ‘furnished in Chinese style’ and decorated with Chinese scrolls on the wall. However, this room is perceived differently when, as Maugham mentions, the visitor recognizes it is also furnished with a scent, the acrid smell of opium, which ‘hung about the house’.⁷³ It is interesting that Maugham’s own description suggests how the temporary opium den ‘hangs’ almost like the ornamental Chinese scroll decorating the same room. The temporary den is a subversive supplement, which renders the respectable room threatening in the eyes of Westerners, who avoid Saunders’s clinic. In an excerpt titled ‘The Opium Den’ in *On a Chinese Screen*, the den is similarly portrayed as a supplement hidden away in the attic of a respectable house.⁷⁴

Maugham’s opium den is a feminine supplement, which transgresses spatial and social limits. This intoxicating supplemental space, I propose, may be expanded beyond the physical features of the den. In *The Narrow Corner*, Kanda is defined by feminine supplements that contaminate the masculine colonial body. These substances – for example, the opium in Saunders’ body and the powder which he carries as part of his luggage, the tropical vegetation found in Louise’s garden filled with Kanari and nutmeg trees which ‘towered like the columns of a mosque in the “Arabian Nights”’,⁷⁵ and the intoxicating perfume Louise wears, which evokes the harem – are supplements, which overwhelm the pristine masculine order of the spaces they occupy.

Here, my proposition for understanding Maugham’s opium den and intoxication in terms of its manifestation through the repressed feminine supplement corresponds with

⁷³ Maugham, *The Narrow Corner*, pp.3-4.

⁷⁴ Maugham, ‘On A Chinese Screen’, p.37.

⁷⁵ Maugham, *The Narrow Corner*, p.133.

Holden's interpretation of Maugham's Kanda as a 'conglomerate east'.⁷⁶ Holden uses 'conglomerate' to describe how the East in this novel is complexly constructed by bringing together different 'ideations' of the East in 'an undifferentiated mass'⁷⁷ such that the 'Exotic East' here, is less easy to signify through masculine attempts, or as Holden describes, difficult 'to apportion meaning, to place a Cartesian net over an unruly landscape',⁷⁸ that is to say, simple oppositions between what is civilized and what is primitive, order and chaos, West and East, masculine and feminine, are elided in a space where the repressed term of each binary overflows its limits.

It is not improbable that Maugham identified, from his familiar position in the Palm Court, a tiny garden dappled in sunlight and shadow, furnished with palm trees and other lush tropical plants, and occupied by a cast of transient foreign guests, a subversive supplemental space nested within a colonial social and architectural order. In a way, the tropical flora of the Palm Court recalls another intoxicating architectural space, which was closer to Maugham's own cultural milieu, that is, the domestic hothouse. The hothouse, an architectural addition to middle and upper class houses for the purpose accommodating exotic plants, peaked in popularity at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.⁷⁹ Often a small and private enclosure of glass attached to the more public reception room, this heated and moist environment evoked a magical environment where exotic plants, typically palms, ferns and orchids, jostled for space

⁷⁶ Holden, *Orienting Masculinity*, *Orienting Nation*, p.113.

⁷⁷ Holden, *Orienting Masculinity*, *Orienting Nation*, p.116.

⁷⁸ Holden, *Orienting Masculinity*, *Orienting Nation*, p.118.

⁷⁹ See Anne Jennings, *Edwardian Gardens* (London: English Heritage, 2005), p.49; John Hix, *The Glass House* (London: Phaidon, 1974), pp.81-95; Priscilla Boniface, *The Garden Room* (London: Royal Commission on Historical Monuments, 1982), pp.i-vi, and Fig.64 (unpaginated), which mentions the conservatory as a space familiar to the 'characters in a Somerset Maugham story'.

with ornate lanterns, decorative pedestals, antique birdcages and domestic knick-knacks. It was also known as a space that elicited risqué conduct.

Art historian Margaret Flanders Darby describes the late nineteenth-century domestic addition as an ambiguous feminine space, ‘half-domesticated’ but where the ‘rigid social rules of the ballroom or drawing room might be temporarily suspended’.⁸⁰ Flanders suggests that the hothouse challenged static notions of boundary, threshold and enclosure, since it was here that femininity was given transient expression in an ‘androcentric world: here nature is also artifice, nurture is also control, the exotic is also the familiar, protection is imprisonment, ... fantasy is reality’.⁸¹ The hothouse was also a popular literary trope in Victorian literature, and was frequently used as a setting for a lovers’ tryst, or perceived as a space for the female protagonist to hatch a plan in secret.⁸²

The French writer, Guy de Maupassant, who was admired by Maugham and whose writing style the latter adopted, wrote a short story titled ‘The Greenhouse’⁸³ in which an elderly and proud couple in a loveless marriage find their passion ignited by spying on their maid’s nightly rendezvous with her lover, illicitly played out in the couple’s hothouse. Maupassant’s description is pithy and clearly relies on the reader’s imaginative perception of the hothouse so as to fill in the gaps of this cryptic but light-hearted story. Like the opium den, which Maugham never really describes in full physical detail, the role of the hothouse as an intoxicating spatial supplement, which temporarily suspends

⁸⁰ Margaret Flanders Darby, ‘The Conservatory in St. John’s Wood’, in Katherine Lochnan (ed.), *Seductive Surfaces: The Art of Tisset* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), pp.161-84; here p.167.

⁸¹ Darby, ‘The Conservatory in St. John’s Wood’, p.162.

⁸² See Michael Waters, ‘The Conservatory in Victorian Literature’, in *Journal of Garden History*, (1982), v.2, n.3, pp.273-84.

⁸³ Guy de Maupassant, ‘The Greenhouse’, in *The Complete Short Stories*, Vol.3 (London: Cassell and Company Ltd., 1970), pp.713-19.

proper codes of conduct for the voyeuristic couple and for their passionate maid in Maupassant's tale, is taken to be self-explanatory. The hothouse is a domesticated object, and yet it is also excessive, threatening to overwhelm what is contained and orderly by its profusion and extravagance.⁸⁴

Here, the metonymic relationship between the opium den, the hothouse and the Palm Court is mediated through Maugham's notion of the 'Exotic East' as a space of intoxication, which I have argued, is a feminized supplemental space, marked by excess and subversion. These spaces are also connected in that they seem outwardly contained and of secondary importance, but at the same time, central to an intimate encounter with the 'Exotic East'. By grafting into the metonymic web of the Palm Court, two more points – Maugham's opium den and the hothouse – I attempt to reinvigorate the Palm Court as an excessive feminine architectural supplement. This intoxicating space consumes the subject – like the opium addict immersed in his experience, Louise blending into Kanda's landscape, the couple engrossed in voyeurism, Maugham engaged in his writing in a tropical garden, or the experiencing subject who goes to the Palm Court in search of the writer and his 'fables of the Exotic East'.

Gossip and the Parlour (with the Verandah)

On his last visit to the Raffles Hotel in 1959, after dinner with the hotel's doctor, Charles Wilson, Maugham and the dinner party gathered on the doctor's patio, and the writer

⁸⁴ See Waters, 'The Conservatory in Victorian Literature', p.278.

reportedly requested, ‘I would love to hear some Singapore tales’, Wilson recalls, ‘And out they flowed! From people you never realized had very extraordinary things happen to them. It was when I was driving him back to the hotel that Maugham said if I didn’t write some of the stories down, he would!’⁸⁵ Maugham’s craft apparently relied on local gossip. Accused by British expatriates living in Malaya and Singapore of converting secrets confided to him into best-selling stories,⁸⁶ the writer claimed that by offering ‘sympathy, justice and magnanimity’ to total strangers, especially foreign expatriates he met during his journeys in the East, he could incite the extraordinary outpouring of emotions from them.⁸⁷ In a short story about family incest called ‘The Book-Bag’, the narrator who relates the tale to us in a first-person account is a writer travelling through Malaya. This writer who is unnamed but may be read as one of Maugham’s ‘*persona*’,⁸⁸ divulges a passion for gossip:

It may seem strange to persons who live in a highly civilized state that he should confide these intimate things to a stranger; it did not seem strange to me. I was used to it. People who live so desperately alone, in the remote places of the earth, find it a relief to tell someone whom in all probability they will never meet again the story that has burdened them perhaps for years their waking thoughts and their dreams at night. And I have an inkling that the fact of your being as a writer attracts their confidence. They feel that what they tell you will excite your

⁸⁵ Sharp, *There Is Only One Raffles*, p.108

⁸⁶ Sharp. *There is Only One Raffles*, p.106.

⁸⁷ See W. Somerset Maugham, ‘The Gentleman in the Parlour’, in *The Travel Books of W. Somerset Maugham*, p.10.

⁸⁸ For a discussion about the problem of distinguishing between Maugham the author and Maugham the narrator, see Holden, *Orienting Masculinity, Orienting Nation*, pp.9-10, pp.20-2.

interest in an impersonal way that makes it easier for them to discharge their souls.⁸⁹

Elsewhere in the opening pages of a travel journal he kept for his journey through Burma, Siam and Indo-China in the 1930s, Maugham finds affinity with a quote from the writer William Hazlitt:

Oh! It is great to shake off the trammels of the world and of public opinion – to lose our importunate, tormenting, everlasting personal identity ... to become the creature of the moment, clear of all ties ... to owe nothing but the score of the evening ... to be known by no other title than *The Gentleman in the Parlour*.⁹⁰

The next thread in this metonymic web concerns the activity of gossip, and its attendant space of the parlour. *The Gentleman in the Parlour* is the title of Maugham's travelogue, which records a journey through British Burma between 1922-1923. This travelogue is composed of anecdotal sketches about places, things and people, gathered from the writer's indulgence in gossip with the expatriate community. In his introduction to the travelogue, Maugham warns the reader that he will find 'little information' in the volume, and that the historian might scorn at the trivial content he has chosen to develop.⁹¹

I propose that Maugham's use of the term 'parlour' deals with the cultural representation of the parlour common to the writer's milieu, that is, a spatial context associated with

⁸⁹ Maugham, 'The Book-Bag', pp.638-9.

⁹⁰ Maugham, 'The Gentleman in the Parlour', p.6.

⁹¹ Maugham, 'The Gentleman in the Parlour', pp.9-10.

women, and particularly known for the denigrated feminine pursuit of gossip.⁹² Literary theorist Deborah Jones points out that gossip is trivialized as ‘a specific type of women’s “language” or “style”’ and may be categorized as ‘house-talk, scandal, bitching and chatting’, which is belittled as lacking in relevance.⁹³ The stature of gossip as ‘small’, and its definition as ‘small talk’ is linked to masculine derision of this feminine activity. For example, scientist Daniel Dennett suggests that gossip is ‘biologically trivial’.⁹⁴ Etymologically, the word ‘gossip’ previously referred to companions attending to a woman in labour, as literary theorists Louise Collins and Patricia Meyer Spacks observe, ‘One who runs about tattling like women at a lying-in’, and later designated the practice of ‘idle talk, trifling or groundless rumour; tittle-tattle’.⁹⁵

I argue that gossip is central to Maugham’s knowledge of the ‘Exotic East’, and that the writer appropriated this feminine activity to advance his craft but at the same time continued to repress its importance. By metonymically associating the Palm Court with Maugham’s parlour and his anecdotal stories, I attempt to reclaim the cultural relevance of gossip as a mode of critical inquiry, and as a way of understanding this garden. While Maugham used gossip in his work, it is improbable that he did so to champion this disparaged feminine activity. For example, recognizing that content in the travelogue

⁹² Maugham’s understanding of the parlour as a woman’s space is evident in an excerpt he wrote about a woman decorating a parlour and making it her own. See W. Somerset Maugham, ‘My Lady’s Parlour’, in ‘On A Chinese Screen’, pp.7-8.

⁹³ Deborah Jones, ‘Gossip: Notes on Women’s Oral Culture’, in *Women’s Studies International Quarterly*, (1980), v.3, pp.193-8; here p.193, p.194.

⁹⁴ Daniel Dennett, *Elbow Room: The Varieties of Free Will Worth Wanting* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1984), p.48, cited by Maryann Ayim, ‘Knowledge Through the Grapevine: Gossip as Inquiry’, in Robert F. Goodman and Aaron Ben-Ze’ev (eds.), *Good Gossip* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1994), pp.85-99; here p.95.

⁹⁵ Patricia Meyer Spacks, *Gossip* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), p.26. See also Louise Collins, ‘Gossip: A Feminist Defence’, in Goodman and Ben-Ze’ev, *Good Gossip*, pp.106-14; especially p.114.

inspired by gossip would be criticized by the ‘historian ... (who) would have hard things to say about me’, Maugham defends his own position by declaring that his writing was only for his own ‘diversion’.⁹⁶ As such, although gossip is used to further his writing, Maugham himself seems also to relegate it as trivial. At the hotel, a similar disavowal of gossip is also at play. While the ‘fact’ of Maugham writing in the Palm Court has been institutionalized and founded on gossip and anecdotal accounts, it is interesting that the status of this ‘information’ has been conveniently elided in the hotel’s monographs. The denigrated status of gossip is especially evident in the hotel’s emergent architectural histories, which as previously discussed, distinctly separate ‘trivia’ on Maugham from architectural ‘facts’.

Unlike the mastery of the individual speaker authoritatively holding a lecture or public address,⁹⁷ gossip is based on informal exchange conducted in small groups, ‘typically two or three, ... consistent with the contexts in which women have historically done their talking – around a kitchen table over a cup of tea’.⁹⁸ It is of no coincidence that Maugham found the prospect of gossip endearing since he was not a confident public orator himself after a severe childhood stammer left him shy.⁹⁹ Maugham’s speech problem was augmented by personal feelings of being an outsider to the colonial circles he frequented.¹⁰⁰ Literary critic Anthony Curtis suggests that Maugham was not an ‘insider writing for members of the club’¹⁰¹ like Rudyard Kipling, another writer whose

⁹⁶ Maugham, ‘The Gentleman in The Parlour’, pp.9-10.

⁹⁷ Ayim, ‘Knowledge Through the Grapevine’, p.88.

⁹⁸ Ayim, ‘Knowledge Through the Grapevine’, p.95.

⁹⁹ A bad stammer since childhood, left Maugham shy and made him a bitter watcher of the world. He was not fond of making public speeches. See for example, Burgess, ‘Introduction’, pp.viii-ix; Calder, *Willie*, pp.10-11.

¹⁰⁰ On Maugham’s ambivalence to colonial society and his sense of exile, see Calder, *Quest for Freedom*, p.13.

¹⁰¹ Anthony Curtis, ‘Introduction’, in Maugham, *The Nonesuch Storytellers*, p.xvii.

stories about the British empire overlapped with Maugham's in terms of geography and themes, rather:

Maugham is a guest, an inquisitive outsider writing for other outsiders. He observes the code in operation; he leaves the reader in no doubt as to the awkward moral questions the working of it sometimes raises, and then he stops. It is not for him, a mere storyteller, to question the whole system of British administration overseas, as it was for E. M. Forster, Orwell and later Paul Scott.¹⁰²

As Anthony Burgess notes in his introduction to Maugham's Malayan stories, much of what the latter wrote 'actually happened'.¹⁰³ Gossip reputedly informed most of Maugham's exotic fiction. For example, *The Letter* (1927) concerned a scandal, which Maugham learnt about through a Singapore lawyer Mr C. Dickinson and his wife,¹⁰⁴ and from researching factual newspaper accounts. According to historian Norman Sherry, who followed up Maugham's sources four decades later in 1976, the accused woman, Mrs Ethel Proudlock, whose highly-publicized trial took place in Singapore in 1911, and inspired the main character of Maugham's *The Letter* was 'the sensation of the day, discussed in all the clubs, at all the dinner parties up and down the (Malay) Peninsula,

¹⁰² Curtis, 'Introduction', p.xvii.

¹⁰³ Burgess, 'Introduction', p.xii.

¹⁰⁴ Another piece of anecdotal evidence linking Maugham to the hotel is the invention of the 'Million Dollar Cocktail', a popular drink served at the hotel's Long Bar since the 1920s. The drink was reputedly inspired by Maugham's story and concocted from the original recipe by Mrs Dickinson, who Maugham personally thanked for her gossip on the Proudlock case. The 'Million Dollar Cocktail' is still served in the hotel today. See Sharp, *There is Only One Raffles*, p.106.

from Singapore to Penang',¹⁰⁵ and that Maugham admitted to writing 'a true story, told to him and "he had nothing to do but make (it) probable, coherent and dramatic"'.¹⁰⁶

The case in *The Letter* involved Mrs Proudlock, the wife of a headmaster in Kuala Lumpur. It was alleged that on 23 April 1911, Mrs Proudlock, who was visited by tin mine manager, William Crozier Steward, shot Steward dead on the verandah of her home. Her husband was out for dinner at the time of the incident. The accused claimed that Steward had tried to rape her and she shot him in her own defence. However, six shots were emptied into different parts of Steward's body, and locals who were near the scene of the shooting gave contradicting evidence to hers. Mrs Proudlock was initially convicted but fully pardoned eleven days later after the British expatriate community in Malaya and Singapore petitioned for her release.

In his story, Maugham chose to build in the gossip that raised doubts about Ethel Proudlock's innocence. *The Letter* refers to an alleged letter, sent by the main character Leslie Crosbie to her lover, asking for him to meet her at her house that night. Maugham's tale is structured around rumours of the affair, and gossip about Mrs Proudlock's jealousy over her lover's relationship with a Chinese woman with whom he lived. The story ends with Mrs Crosbie's lawyer purchasing the incriminating letter from the Chinese woman in order to save his client from going to the gallows. 'This was no invention,' Sherry reminds us, 'but a taking up and elaborating of accusations made, but not proved, at Mrs Proudlock's trial'.¹⁰⁷ I also find it fascinating that although Sherry's

¹⁰⁵ W. Somerset Maugham, 'The Letter', in *The Complete Short Stories of W. Somerset Maugham*, Vol.3 (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1952), pp.1414-45; here p.1418.

¹⁰⁶ Sherry, 'Crime of Passion'.

¹⁰⁷ Sherry, 'Crime of Passion'.

own research is partly conducted through gossiping with, and listening to local people who remember the case, he is at pains to distinguish Maugham's story as a work that relies more on fact than gossip. Sherry's implicit derision of gossip in his own endeavours and Maugham's writing repeats the division between 'proper' knowledge and gossip as idle feminine chatter.

However, *The Letter* is intriguing particularly because it is attuned to the located knowledges of different groups of people in the community, that is, it articulated both the voices that were considered to matter and those that were not. By arguing for the criticality of gossip through anecdotal evidence itself in this discourse, for example, using Maugham's story, and relating his process of crafting the famous tale through gossip, I am suggesting, following feminist philosopher Lorraine Code, that gossip has positive value as located and interested epistemic knowledge:

The processes of reciprocal prompting, imagining, picking out and integrating details (conversational moves that check for truth: 'Did she really?' 'Are you sure?') – the dispersed, informal interplay – all of these are essential, *sine qua non*, to their conclusions. All the while, they are otherwise engaged; the gossip accompanies, grows out of, and embellishes (cognitively) their practical preoccupations.¹⁰⁸

Gossip is belittled but it is also seen as a threat, because of its 'incalculable scope. One can never know quite where it goes, whom it reaches, how it changes in transmission,

¹⁰⁸ Lorraine Code, 'Gossip, or in Praise of Chaos', in *Rhetorical Spaces: Essays on Gendered Locations* (New York: Routledge, 1995), pp.144-53; here p.146.

how and by whom it is understood'.¹⁰⁹ It is an activity of feminine excess defined by 'unruliness ... (a) resistance to paradigmatic summing up, which is at once the locus of its power and its danger'.¹¹⁰ Code's argument for gossip as an epistemology constructed out of 'interested specificity' also counts on a willingness to listen to another person among the conditions that make this kind of knowledge possible, and this listening being finely attuned 'with the location, the historical moment, and the circumstances that comprise it'.¹¹¹ While listening is traditionally regarded as a passive feminine activity,¹¹² literary critic Maryann Ayim attests that gossip involves active listening, 'A large part of the good gossip's method is to keep her ear to the grapevine as it were, to listen very carefully to the village talk as a means of gleaning information about events that she may be precluded from directly observing herself'.¹¹³

Commenting on his own stories, Maugham noted that, 'The anecdote is interesting apart from the narration, so that it would secure attention if it were told over the dinner table'.¹¹⁴ It is also interesting that the anecdotal format of Maugham's short stories, a literary form especially prominent in his Malayan fiction, is consistent with the style of gossip. As Collins notes, '... the style of gossip is characteristically anecdotal, containing reported speech or embedded narratives, and oblique, relying on conversational

¹⁰⁹ Spacks, *Gossip*, p.6.

¹¹⁰ Code, 'Gossip, or in Praise of Chaos', p.152.

¹¹¹ Code, 'Gossip, or in Praise of Chaos', p.153.

¹¹² For the risk of feminization as a result of listening, see Diana Fuss and Joel Sanders, 'Berggasse 19: Inside Freud's Office', in Joel Sanders (ed.), *Stud: Architectures of Masculinity* (Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996), pp.112-39; especially p.130; Gemma Corradi Fiumara, *The Other Side of Language: A Philosophy of Listening* (London: Routledge, 1990), pp.6-11; p.42.

¹¹³ Ayim, 'Knowledge Through the Grapevine', p.90.

¹¹⁴ Somerset Maugham cited by Graham Greene, 'Maugham's Short Stories' in *The Spectator*, CLIII, London, 31 August 1934, p.297. Extract reprinted in Curtis and Whitehead, *The Critical Heritage*, p.288.

implications rather than assertion, (and) on suggestion ...'.¹¹⁵ As I argued earlier, this thesis reclaims anecdotal evidence as crucial to a feminine mode of interpretation and central to the intimate encounter.¹¹⁶ Here, gossip constitutes a version of anecdotal evidence. My interest in anecdote constituted through gossip is spatially motivated, that is, as Maugham suggests, the anecdote takes place over certain spaces, for example, over the dining table. The spatial setting for this kind of 'informal speech' is frequently domestic or associated with spaces occupied by women, as Jones emphasizes:

... the setting is the house, the hairdressers', the supermarket: locales associated with the female role both at home and outside of it. There are also domestic enclaves within male institutions: the women's toilet or cloakrooms, the cluster of women in the corridor or the tearoom.¹¹⁷

This kind of feminine setting is also characteristic of Maugham's 'parlour', which as I pointed out earlier, refers to a cultural understanding of a woman's domain. The parlour takes after the word 'parler', which means to talk.¹¹⁸ In *The Gentleman's House; or, How to Plan English Residences* (1864), the architect Robert Kerr defines the parlour as one of three particularly feminine rooms in a house, the other two being the boudoir and the morning room.¹¹⁹ Parlours were located in different parts of the house depending on class. The upper and middle class houses had parlours or 'drawing rooms' (as a parlour was also called) on the first storey, at the front of the house. These parlours were used to receive

¹¹⁵ Collins, 'Gossip: A Feminist Defence', p.107.

¹¹⁶ See *Empirical Contexts*, pp.106-9.

¹¹⁷ Jones, 'Gossip', p.194.

¹¹⁸ Thad Logan, *The Victorian Parlour* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp.12-13.

¹¹⁹ Robert Kerr cited by Vanessa Chase, 'Edith Wharton, The Decoration of Houses, and Gender in Turn-of-the-Century America', in Debra Coleman, Elizabeth Danze and Carol Henderson (eds.), *Architecture and Feminism* (Princeton: Prince Architectural Press, 1996), pp.130-60; here p.144.

guests and for the ladies to congregate after dinner. Working class houses had parlours on the ground floor, also at the front of the house but this room was used only on Sundays and had the best furniture in the house.¹²⁰ As architectural historian Vanessa Chase observes, the parlour was lavishly decorated, and ‘particularly affiliated with the woman who entertained within it’.¹²¹ Although exact details varied depending on class, wealth and taste, the parlour was feminine in decoration, and would hold, for example, family heirlooms, pieces of antique furniture, patterned rugs and wallpaper, bookcases, a bureau for writing and cabinets for displaying china.¹²²

Maugham’s use of the phrase ‘the gentleman in the parlour’, I suggest, points to the key role gossip plays in constructing the writer’s knowledge of the ‘Exotic East’. I interpret Maugham’s ‘parlour’ as a feminine spatio-temporal order, which overlaid the Eastern spaces he encountered. It may be argued that Maugham created ephemeral ‘parlours’ or nodes for gossip in ships, ports, clubs, hotels, over dinner tables and afternoon tea, while he travelled through the East. It is also interesting that in at least two of Maugham’s stories, the verandahs and gardens of hotels are portrayed as spaces where key information is revealed through gossip.

For example, the conclusion to *The Narrow Corner* unfolds in gossip exchanged between Saunders and the skipper, Captain Nichols, on the dusty verandah of a hotel called the

¹²⁰ For an architectural discussion on mid nineteenth and early twentieth-century English house plans and women’s role in the domestic realm, see for example, Marion Roberts, *Living in a Man-Made World: Gender as Assumptions in Modern Housing Design* (London: Routledge, 1991), pp.19-33.

¹²¹ Chase, ‘Edith Wharton’, p.140.

¹²² Logan, *The Victorian Parlour*, pp.105-10. See also Chase’s discussion on Edith Wharton and the art of decorating the drawing room. Chase, ‘Edith Wharton’, pp.140-4, p.151. Roberts notes that for the working class houses in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, ‘The parlour permitted a degree of comfort in permitting a separation between leisure and housework’. See Roberts, *Living in a Man-Made World*, p.28

van Dyke in Singapore,¹²³ and in another story called *The Four Dutchmen*, secrets are divulged by the manager of another fictitious Singapore hotel, this one called the Van Dorth Hotel where there was ‘a scrap of garden facing the street where you could sit in the shade of trees...’.¹²⁴ Jones has suggested that gossip flourishes in ‘domestic enclaves within male institutions’.¹²⁵ Arguably, the Palm Court being a garden located in a masculine colonial space is an example of such an enclave. Following Jones’ argument and recognizing Maugham’s interest in gossip, it is interesting to speculate what kind of meanings the Palm Court held for Maugham, and how this space could be related to an ‘Exotic East’ knowable through the feminine practice of gossip.

The Palm Court is defined on three edges by verandahs where ‘extras’ like wicker furniture, bird-cages, and potted plants are deposited. Architectural historian Anthony D. King, suggests that the verandah carried a symbolic significance as a marker of ‘tropical’ and colonial lifestyles which were comparatively more luxurious and superior to the native peoples, ‘... a feature made necessary by the social as well as spatial separation of one dwelling from another and, as a space to spend one’s spare time, it was a symbol of economic and political status’.¹²⁶ While King’s verandah seems to feature as an autonomous structure, writer David Malouf describes the verandah as a space of exchange:

A verandah is not part of the house. Even a child knows this. It is what allows the traveling salesmen, with one foot on the step to heave their cases over the

¹²³ Maugham, *The Narrow Corner*, pp.244-8.

¹²⁴ W. Somerset Maugham, ‘The Four Dutchmen’, in *The Complete Short Stories*, pp.1151-7; here p.1151.

¹²⁵ Jones, ‘Gossip’, p.194.

¹²⁶ Anthony D. King, *The Bungalow: The Production of a Global Culture* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984), pp.265-7.

threshold and show their wares with no embarrassment on either side, no sense of privacy violated. It has allowed my mother, with her strict notion of forms, to bring a perfect stranger in off the street and settle her (for ever as it happens) in one of our squatter's chairs. Verandahs are no-man's-land, border zones that keep contact with the house and its activities on one face but are open on the other to the street, the night and all the vast, unknown areas beyond.¹²⁷

Malouf's verandah manifests, for post-colonial literary theorist Bill Ashcroft, a 'horizon', which embraces 'the surplus, the interstitial, outward-looking ... It is the region of discovery, possibility and flight'.¹²⁸ Through a metonymic association with Maugham's 'parlour' and the rehabilitation of gossip as a critical mode of inquiry, the Palm Court bounded by verandahs, may be conceptualized as a kind of horizon animated by conversation, interaction, negotiation and invitation. The 'parlour' in Maugham's context suggests a conceptual understanding of the 'Exotic East' founded on the unruly feminine pursuit of gossip. As demonstrated in *The Letter* and from angry accusations hurled at the writer by other expatriates, Maugham's practice of gossip was far from trivial and threatened to divulge important knowledge repressed by the European community in Malaya.

By grafting the parlour into the Palm Court's metonymic web, I attempt, first, to reclaim this garden as a space of feminine excess neglected by colonial accounts and the hotel's emergent architectural history, and second, to activate the role of gossip and anecdote in my own intimate encounter with Maugham in the Palm Court by acknowledging the

¹²⁷ David Malouf, *12 Edmonstone Street*, (London: Chatto and Windus, 1985), p.20, cited by Bill Ashcroft, *Post-colonial Transformation* (London: Routledge, 2001), pp.193-4.

¹²⁸ Ashcroft, *Post-colonial Transformation*, p.183, p.193.

critical debt owed to these sources and making these modes of knowledge central to an architectural discourse of this garden. Certainly today, the Palm Court is still enlivened with gossip about Maugham's 'Exotic East' and how the writer laboured with his stories in this garden. It is this particular writing scene which is the subject of the next section.

Masculine Self-Definition and the Study (with the Blue Plaque House)

Maugham often expressed a deep interest in the spaces, manners and writing methods of other writers. Telling of Machiavelli's and Burke's working habits, he commented that both writers saw the study as a space where an individual could be himself:

... when he (Machiavelli) retired to his study to write he discarded his country clothes and donned the damask robe ... So, in spirit did Burke. In his study he was no longer the reckless punter, the shameless sponge, the unscrupulous place-hunter ... the dishonest advocate who attacked measures introduced to correct scandalous abuses because his pocket would be affected by their passage. In his study he was the high-minded man whom his friends loved and honoured for his nobility of spirit, his greatness and magnanimity. In his study he was the honest man he was assured he was.¹²⁹

The image of a writer working in a tropical hotel's Palm Court would probably have given Maugham himself much to think about. The third thread of the Palm Court's

¹²⁹ Maugham in 'After Reading Burke', in *The Vagrant Mood* (1952), cited by Curtis, *The Pattern of Maugham*, pp.11-12.

metonymic web takes up this image as it relates to Maugham's writing practice. This thread interprets another facet of Maugham's 'Exotic East', that is, the writer's nomadic writing practice, which takes place in transit during travel to the East, away from the family home, and explores the influence of this nomadic practice on the writer's position with regards to masculine self-definition.

Through an intimate encounter with the image of Maugham working in the Palm Court, this discussion examines notions of privacy and spatial constructions of the self through one of the most important sites for masculine self-definition, namely, the study. In particular, I am interested in the difference between the writer working in transit in the Palm Court and working in a study of a family house. Following Maugham's understanding of the study as a private space that allowed the writer to reveal himself, an architectural interpretation into the private spaces of writing – Maugham's makeshift study in the Palm Court and his study in his London house – may inform the interplay between Maugham's private and public selves, which I will argue, was negotiated through specific architectural spaces.

Architectural theorist Mark Wigley asserts that the study is a gendered space, in particular one linked to the man of the house and a space that reinforces the normalcy of heterosexual masculinity.¹³⁰ Wigley argues the study supports the production of specific patriarchal texts for example, 'contracts, records, family trees, anecdotes about, and prescriptions for, good family life, details of private relationships, ancestors, etc, to be passed on to the eldest male child', and above all, the memoir, a document which

¹³⁰ Mark Wigley, 'Untitled: The Housing of Gender', in Beatriz Colomina (ed.), *Sexuality and Space* (Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 1992), pp.326-89.

consolidates all other patriarchal texts.¹³¹ He highlights that the texts produced in the study, in turn, actively sustained the individual's sense of privacy and assisted in the cultural construction of the study as a space associated with masculine self-definition.¹³² Wigley also suggests that the study was a kind of closet, 'which detaches the theorist-father-husband from the world precisely in order that he can master that world by viewing it through some kind of disciplinary frame whether a painting, a theoretical manuscript, memoir or account book'.¹³³

Wigley's interpretation highlights three points, which may be explored in relation to the spaces Maugham worked in. First, the study helps in the self-definition of a heterosexual masculine individual. Second, important patriarchal texts produced in the study sustained the construction of this space. Third, these texts reinforced the normalcy of a masculine heterosexual body.

We know that Maugham disposed of his private papers. We also know he did not publish an autobiography, preferring to ambiguously lodge his private life within fictional plots, for example, in the autobiographical novel, *Of Human Bondage* (1915), and in his mature years, in a serialized publication of his controversially 'fictionalized' memoirs, *Looking Back* by the tabloid newspaper *Sunday Express* (1962).¹³⁴ *Looking Back*, which was

¹³¹ Wigley, 'Untitled: The Housing of Gender', p.348.

¹³² Wigley, 'Untitled: The Housing of Gender', p.349, p.350.

¹³³ Wigley, 'Untitled: The Housing of Gender', p.362.

¹³⁴ *Looking Back* was serialized by *Sunday Express* in eight parts from 9 September - 28 October 1962 in the United Kingdom, and by the American art magazine, *Show* between June and August of the same year. Maugham apparently gave in to publication of his memoirs because of the large sums of money offered by both newspapers but Maugham's critics and scholars believe that the decision was taken primarily because it offered a final opportunity for the ailing writer to present a fictionalized version of his private life before

never published in book form, has been interpreted by Maugham critics to be a work of masked self-presentation, especially in its vilification of Syrie Maugham for the failure of their marriage and its 'sexual dishonesty'¹³⁵ in the denial of Maugham's liaison with Haxton and suggestions of a "sexual congress" with a string of women'.¹³⁶ We know that Maugham often chose to write outside the confines of the domestic private study, and the Palm Court is an example of one such location. These observations are not just of biographical interest since as Wigley observes, the memoir is spatially motivated by notions of patriarchal privacy and self-definition. Here, I attempt to explore the link between Maugham's masculine self-fashioning in relation to the spaces he wrote in. In particular, I am interested whether Maugham's writing habit in the Palm Court contested spatial (he worked outside the study), textual (he produced fictional memoirs) and sexual (he traveled with a male companion while remaining married at 'home' in London) boundaries associated with a heterosexual masculine subject. Does Maugham's habit of writing in an arguably feminized tropical hotel Palm Court instead of a domestic private study suggest a perception of the Palm Court in which a different kind of private self could be publicly constructed? If yes, what kind of masculine subject did the 'Exotic East' produce, and what positions were available to Maugham who persistently wrote outside the patriarchal family study?

As Said proposes, the East is typically cast as a feminized space redolent with promiscuous sexuality, and permissive of aberrant homosexuality.¹³⁷ However, as mentioned earlier, Holden argues that there are 'two orientalist tropes ... across the

family or friends could expose any secrets. See Calder, *Willie*, pp.363-5, pp.372-4; Curtis, *The Pattern of Maugham*, pp.248-52; Connon, *Somerset Maugham*, pp.31-2, pp.272-6.

¹³⁵ Calder, *Willie*, p.372.

¹³⁶ Connon, *Somerset Maugham*, p.273.

¹³⁷ Said, *Orientalism*, p.188, p.190.

range of Maugham's imaginative geography'¹³⁸ that complicate Said's stable binary definition of the East as simply passive and feminine. In Holden's view, Maugham's East was ambiguous – he feminized the East but there was also a sense that the East was actively involved in the production of a colonial masculine subjectivity:

Masculinity is not so much imposed upon a feminized landscape as produced there in a dialectical self/other relationship. Contingent upon the Orient for its very existence, colonial masculinity is thus profoundly ambivalent in its need for and continual separation from the Orient.¹³⁹

Maugham's 'Exotic East' is, I argue, a conceptual space created by the writer using masculinized colonial perceptions of race and sexuality, imaginative geography and fiction, which enabled Maugham to actively construct his own colonial 'masculinity', and at the same time, to secretly engage with homosexuality. Holden emphasizes that distant colonial communities were 'historically not merely *wardrobes* for the trying on of different constructions of masculinity, but factories for the "cultivation of all that is masculine and the expulsion of all that is effeminate"'.¹⁴⁰ The homophobic atmosphere at the turn of the twentieth century culminated in London's Cleveland Street affair and the Oscar Wilde trials, which was closely followed by Maugham himself, criminalized homosexuality and consequently, shaped the particularities of Maugham's fiction and his personal masculine self-fashioning.¹⁴¹

¹³⁸ Holden, *Orienting Masculinity, Orienting Nation*, p.16.

¹³⁹ Holden, *Orienting Masculinity, Orienting Nation*, p.16.

¹⁴⁰ Ronald Hyam, *Empire and Sexuality: The British Experience* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), p.72, cited by Holden, *Orienting Masculinity, Orienting Nation*, p.4. Emphasis mine.

¹⁴¹ Calder, *Willie*, pp.39-41; Holden, *Orienting Masculinity, Orienting Nation*, p.13

For example, Holden points out that Maugham's Malayan stories relied upon the camaraderie of men, who would recount in the secure presence of each other and usually in the comforts of a London location, previous exploits sited faraway in the East and frequently involving a female protagonist.¹⁴² Holden interprets Maugham's fiction through the theoretical perspectives suggested by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick who has theorized that the prohibition of homosocial relations between men produced a translation of these desires through 'the medium of women'.¹⁴³ In Maugham's exotic fiction, this displacement was manifested in two ways – first, through the risqué female characters in his stories and second, through the feminization of space according to Maugham's implicitly sexualized 'Exotic East'.¹⁴⁴

Thus, the writing scene at the Palm Court may be interpreted on the one hand, as a space of heterosexual masculine knowledge since as Holden points out, the image of the writer in the East itself represented a masculine trope, 'Many European writers associate the ability to write, to process and re-export raw material dug up in the middle east, with heterosexual virility...'.¹⁴⁵ On the other hand, just as subtle themes of homoeroticism may be detected in Maugham's exotic fiction, where two male subjects and a female subject (either manifested through a female character or through a feminized landscape) are framed such that the latter is only a front for the hidden homoerotic relationship of

¹⁴² See for example, Maugham, *The Narrow Corner*; Maugham, 'Neil Macadam'; W. Somerset Maugham, 'Footprints in the Jungle', in *Far Eastern Tales*, pp.1-38; Holden, *Orienting Masculinity*, *Orienting Nation*, pp.101-2.

¹⁴³ Holden discusses at length the application of the Girardian triangle involving two male subjects and a female subject, framed in such a way that it is actually the relationship between the two male subjects which is at stake, and the female subject serves only as a medium of exchange or commodity in order to sustain the prohibited relationship. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosexual Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), see especially pp.25-6, cited by Holden, *Orienting Masculinity*, *Orienting Nation*, p.13.

¹⁴⁴ Holden, *Orienting Masculinity*, *Orienting Nation*, p.19.

¹⁴⁵ Holden, *Orienting Masculinity*, *Orienting Nation*, p.149.

the two male subjects,¹⁴⁶ the feminization of the Palm Court as a titillating space representative of the 'Exotic East' may facilitate a homosocial relationship between two male subjects.¹⁴⁷ Following Holden's reading of the East as a location for trying on different masculine selves, the Palm Court may be understood as a performative 'wardrobe' or a 'closet' for Maugham's masculine self-fashioning. It is also striking that historically, the space of the study started from a cabinet or a closet, which held the private papers of the man of the house.¹⁴⁸

I propose that the scene of writing at the Palm Court is inseparable from the production of a certain kind of 'private' life acceptable to Maugham's colonial public. Thus, an understanding of this space benefits from being interpreted against the writer's careful construction of such sanctioned 'private' selves. Maugham's occupation is distinctively referenced in at least two spaces, which although separated by geographical distance and cultural differences, are fascinating when they are interpreted in relation to each other.

At the Raffles Hotel, a plaque on the door of Suite No. 102 overlooking the Palm Court (formerly room no.77) is representative of Maugham's nomadic writing life spent in numerous hotel rooms during prolonged journeys made to the East after 1916. By contrast, thousands of miles away in London's wealthy Mayfair, a Blue Plaque was

¹⁴⁶ Holden, *Orienting Masculinity, Orienting Nation*, p.151.

¹⁴⁷ During his first two visits to the hotel accompanied by his travel companion Haxton, Maugham was married even if he was never seen in the company of his wife, Syrie, while he was in the East. Ironically, for Maugham who eschewed the normalcy of a family house, Syrie became renowned for her design of home interiors.

¹⁴⁸ See Henry Urbach, 'Closets, Clothes, disClosure', in Duncan McCorquodale, Katerina Ruedi and Sarah Wigglesworth (eds.), *Desiring Practices: Architecture, Gender and the Interdisciplinary* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 1996), pp.246-63; Wigley, 'Untitled: The Housing of Gender', pp.347-8.

erected by English Heritage, the official custodian of English monuments,¹⁴⁹ on the façade of a four-storey Georgian house at 6 Chesterfield Street during the centenary of Maugham's birth in 1974. (Fig.2.2.2) This address, conversely, vouches for Maugham's domestic existence where he assumed, albeit awkwardly, the staged roles of husband and father between 1911 and 1919.¹⁵⁰ While Maugham had several London addresses, 6 Chesterfield Street was chosen by English Heritage because during his stay here Maugham's popularity was at its height with a string of successful plays staged in London's West End and New York's Broadway, and the release of his most highly acclaimed work, the autobiographical fiction *Of Human Bondage* in 1915.¹⁵¹

Inevitably, at both locations, the experiencing subject encounters the biographical and professional details of the named writer. I suggest that the experiences of Suite No. 102 Raffles Hotel (Fig.2.2.3) and 6 Chesterfield Street are constructed primarily through an interest in the life and work of the occupant rather than through a particular aspect of the architectural design. In an article on the architectural significance of the Blue Plaque,¹⁵² I have argued that the architectural plaque operates beyond a commemorative supplement, which describes the celebrated occupant's publicly endorsed private life. The plaque also suggests another version of the occupant's private life, which may be repressed. While initially conceived as a supplement to the building, the information

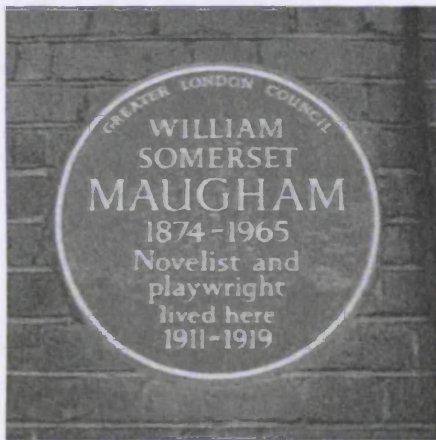
¹⁴⁹ A formal selection criteria for Blue Plaque houses was established in 1954. To be eligible for a plaque, the nominee must have been dead for twenty years or have passed the centenary of their birth. They must 'have made an important positive contribution to human welfare or happiness'. Emily Cole, *Blue Plaques: A Guide to the Scheme* (London: English Heritage Publications, 2002), p.2.

¹⁵⁰ Other works written between 1911-1919 include the novel, *The Moon and Sixpence* (1919) and plays, *The Land of Promise* (1913) and *Caesar's Wife* (1919).

¹⁵¹ Calder, *Willie*, pp.115-22; Connon, *Somerset Maugham*, pp.47-51.

¹⁵² Lilian Chee, 'An Architecture of Twenty Words: Intimate Details of a London Blue Plaque House', in Hilde Heynen and Gulsum Baydar (eds.), *Negotiating Domesticity: Spatial Productions of Gender in Modern Architecture* (London: Routledge, 2005), pp.181-95.

about the occupant on the plaque ultimately plays a key role in shaping the experiencing subject's architectural perception, thus, shifting the production of architectural meaning from architect to occupant and experiencing subject. I have argued that the plaque serves as 'a metonymical device of intimacy. We enter the interior of the house (and the room) not through the masterly reading of a plan, but through the peripheral reading'¹⁵³ of biographical details, working methods, and spatial practices of the occupant.



2.2.2 6 Chesterfield Street and Blue Plaque.



2.2.3 The Somerset Maugham Suite

¹⁵³ Chee, 'An Achitecture of Twenty Words', p.183.

The two locations facilitate the production of two conflicting private selves, that is, between the Maugham at the tropical hotel and the Maugham of the Mayfair residence. The Mayfair house was one of the many London houses Maugham owned.¹⁵⁴ (Fig.2.2.4) Compared to the minimal existence of hotel living, this Georgian townhouse had three storeys with a basement and an attic:

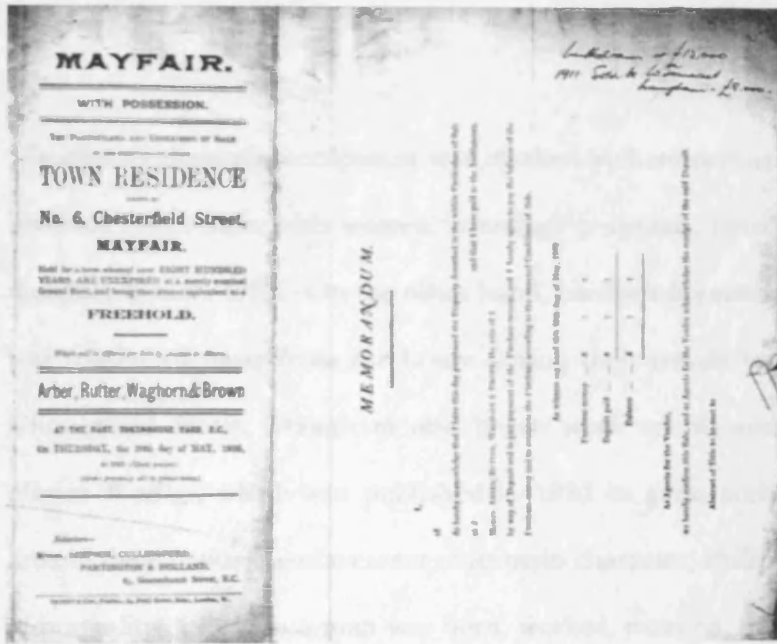
6 Chesterfield Street was built in or shortly after 1755. It is a brick building 3 windows wide and 4 storeys high with a basement and attic storey; a stone cornice divides the second and third floors. The entrance is in the central bay of the ground floor. No.6 was originally flanked by two similar houses, number 5 and 7; these were gutted during the Second World War and the three houses were subsequently converted into flats. The facades of numbers 5 and 7 have been retained but windows have been substituted for the entrance doorways. The flats are entered through the original number 6 which did not suffer war damage and the façade remains largely unaltered.¹⁵⁵

This house was richly furnished and had separate accommodation for servants. Maugham's study was on the third floor in a space originally designated for sleeping. According to Maugham's friend Hugh Walpole, it was one of the 'most hospitable ... houses in London' where Maugham entertained in the lower floors and wrote in seclusion in an isolated room on the top floor, which for Walpole was 'the most ideal

¹⁵⁴ Maugham's other London addresses include: 27 Carlisle Mansions, Carlisle Place (1900-1905/06), 56a Pall Mall (1906/07-1907/08), 23 Mount Street (1908/09-1911), 2 Wyndham Place (1920/21-1923), 43 Bryanston Square (1924-1926), 213 King's Road (1927-1928). (Source: W. S. Maugham Blue Plaque File, LD/SG/BP.1812, English Heritage, London).

¹⁵⁵ Extract about 6 Chesterfield Street from Report by Director-General Historic Buildings Board (Greater London Council), 1 November 1973, p.2. (Source: W. S. Maugham Blue Plaque File, LD/SG/BP.1812, English Heritage, London).

writing room that I have ever seen' since this arrangement allowed Maugham to separate his roles as socialite and writer.¹⁵⁶



2.2.4 Auction bill for 6 Chesterfield Street.

Nevertheless, Maugham's move into 6 Chesterfield Street was marked by an increasing adherence to domestic norms. For example, his intimate relationship with long-time friend Walter Payne with whom Maugham had shared a flat, ended when he moved into the Georgian house, and Maugham 'began to think of marriage'.¹⁵⁷ Maugham thought marriage would give him peace and freedom:

There was no one I particularly wanted to marry. It was the condition that attracted me. It seemed a necessary motif in the pattern of life I had designed,

¹⁵⁶ Hugh Walpole, 'William Somerset Maugham: A Pen Portrait By a Friendly Hand', in Cleveland Amory and Frederic Bradlee (eds.), *Vanity Fair: A Cavalcade of the 1920s and 1930s* (New York; Viking Press, 1930), p.40, cited by Calder, *Willie*, p.115.

¹⁵⁷ Calder, *Willie*, p.121.

and to my ingenuous fancy ... it offered peace; peace from the disturbance of love affairs, ... peace that would enable me to write all I wanted to write and a settled and dignified way of life. I sought freedom and thought I could find it in marriage.¹⁵⁸

Maugham's domestic occupation was marked by heterosexual normalcy within, which involved love affairs with women, marriage proposals, marriage and the birth of his daughter Liza in 1915. On the other hand, his illicit homosexual relations with Haxton was conducted away from the house during their travels together to the East.¹⁵⁹ At Chesterfield Street, Maugham also began work on his autobiographical fiction, *Of Human Bondage*, which was published in 1915 to great acclaim. This story revolves around the emotional enslavement of its main character, Philip, who yearns for a pattern of normality, 'in which a man was born, worked, married, had children, and died',¹⁶⁰ a pattern, which mirrored Maugham's own ambitions to alter his domestic arrangements once settling in 6 Chesterfield Street. Wigley argues that 'marriage is already spatial',¹⁶¹ that is, marriage prescribes particular domestic arrangements of space, and ultimately, a family house like 6 Chesterfield Street, 'makes space' for the institution of marriage. The house made possible, spatially and ideologically, the notion of marriage, which Maugham took advantage of and then fled from, choosing to lodge in hotel rooms where the responsibilities of family life were not present. Thus, the house and its institution of

¹⁵⁸ W. Somerset Maugham, *The Summing Up* (London: Heinemann, 1938), pp.197-198, cited by Calder, *Willie*, p.121.

¹⁵⁹ Maugham conducted a love affair with actress Sue Jones, who rejected his marriage proposal in 1913. He met Syrie in 1911, began a love affair with her in 1914, and married her in 1917. In 1915, he also started a long-term affair with Gerald Haxton. See Forrest D. Burt, *W. Somerset Maugham* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1986), p.59.

¹⁶⁰ W. Somerset Maugham, *Of Human Bondage* (London: Heinemann, 1937), p.647.

¹⁶¹ Wigley, 'Untitled: The Housing of Gender', p.336.

marriage, while problematic, offered Maugham an alibi and freedom to pursue his other closeted self through writing and travelling.

The plaques leading to Suite 102 facing the Palm Court and to the house on Chesterfield Street strive to reproduce idealized representations of the private self. In this sense, the plaque is subservient to the ideal social order represented by, on the one hand, a room overlooking a Palm Court in a tropical hotel where the occupant is represented as a carefree colonial gentleman, and on the other hand, the family rooms which house the respectable family man. However, the plaque has a corollary effect in that it is also excessive in its references. As I have suggested elsewhere, the plaque, 'does not merely celebrate what is there, but points to what has escaped, is absent, unmarked, or unsaid. As a metonymic device, it indicates things and spaces outside of itself'.¹⁶²

The Maugham who informs and complicates our knowledge and experience of these spaces is understood simultaneously as a heterosexual, masculine subject, a discreet homosexual, a dutiful husband, a nomadic bachelor and a writer of fiction. The image of Maugham writing in the Palm Court becomes complex when it is understood in terms of how the writer used the 'Exotic East' to re-fashion his masculinity, away from familial obligations and domestic constraints. The makeshift study in the Palm Court in a feminized 'Exotic East', I suggest, becomes the bedrock upon which Maugham builds his public colonial heterosexual personae. The Palm Court may have furnished the writer with another kind of 'study' or 'closet', from which he was free to construct contradicting public and private selves.

¹⁶² Chee, 'An Architecture of Twenty Words', p.192.

The scene of Maugham's writing, I have argued, is a gendered location. At the Palm Court, Maugham could contest the spatial, textual and sexual boundaries normally fixed to the domestic study. The texts produced at the two kinds of study correspond with these gendered locations. If the Malayan stories, as Holden argues, holds clues to Maugham's homosexual proclivity, the fictional autobiography about family contentment produced in the Georgian house affirms a heterosexual normalcy. Far from its gender-neutral architectural portrayal, I argue that the Palm Court is one of Maugham's Exotic Eastern spaces, which is implicated in 'the process of writing about the Orient and being read in the Occident', and instrumental to 'the construction of a closeted subjectivity, the public man of letters and the private homosexual'.¹⁶³

Grafting a Floral Archive

I have attempted to understand and speculatively construct a complex and expansive web of associations arising from an intimate encounter with the Palm Court through its occupant, W. Somerset Maugham. Here, a metonymic web is formed by grafting spaces, and subjects drawn from spatial, biographical, fictional and historical details linked to Maugham, his 'Exotic East' and his writing practice. This rhizomatic web attempts to energize the architectural discourse of the Palm Court through a gendered interpretation and to rethink architectural typology through metonymic associations.

¹⁶³ Holden, *Orienting Masculinity, Orienting Nation*, p.21.

Maugham's 'Exotic East' has been constructed through three themes, namely, intoxication, gossip and masculine self-definition, and their related spaces, which are the opium den, the parlour and the study. I have also grafted on another network of spaces through an architectural interpretation of the hothouse, the verandah and the Blue Plaque House, which I suggest are metonymically related to the themes and spaces discussed. I have argued that this expansive web illuminates a specific understanding of Maugham's 'Exotic East', which revolves around a repressed feminine excess.

Although the web is undeniably grafted from collective knowledge about Maugham's association with the Palm Court, it is also relationally patterned from my own feminist interest in aspects of Maugham's fiction and his writing life, read in relation to the hotel's colonial architectural history. The web as it stands, is necessarily partial, and intentionally, a construction with loose ends.

The final thread of this web may be read as a speculative feminine archive for the Palm Court. It is a document linked to another writer, who like Maugham, is remembered in a room named after him overlooking the same garden. This invented feminine archive re-opens the rhizomatic architectural typology of the Palm Court for you, the reader, to re-negotiate this architectural space and perhaps, to alter the shape of this web, according to *your* intimate encounter.

2.2.5a Inventory #124

RM/PC/1987/124/encl. 124.1-124.3

RAFFLES HOTEL

For File: Palm Court and Palm Court Wing

Inventory #124

[5 numbered letters with envelopes, unopened at time of finding, addressed to 'Mr R. Reyes, Raffles Hotel, Singapore', found in Room 52 by guest, V. Teitelboim in December 1986]

Notes:

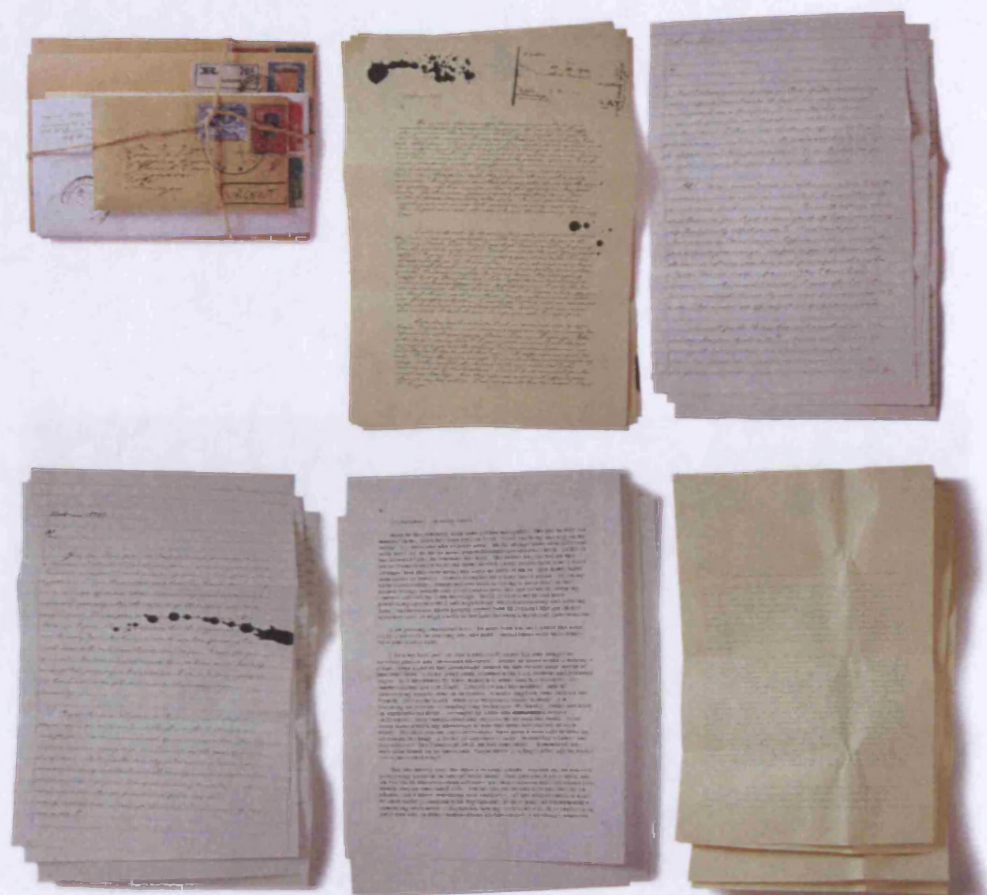
During the 1989 renovation of the Raffles Hotel, a cache containing three letters (numbered 1-5) were found in one of the rooms facing the Palm Court. The letters were from a woman, simply called J and were addressed to a man, called R. The letters were found at the bottom of an antique mother-of-pearl writing desk drawer in suite number 52. The envelopes show no return address but all were sent to a Mr R. Reyes. Seed packets accompanying these letters were missing.

Initial investigations suggest that R may have been the Chilean poet Pablo Neruda who stayed at the Raffles Hotel for one night in 1930, on route from Ceylon to Batavia where he held the position of Consulate for Chile of Singapore and Batavia. Neruda left the hotel in a hurry with his wet laundry. He failed to settle his room bill. He married a Dutch-Javanese woman called Maria Vogelzanz or 'Maruca' in December 1930. It is speculated that J is not Maruca but the Burmese lover who haunted the Chilean poet until the end. Her name was Josie Bliss.

These letters will be deposited in the hotel vaults until further investigations can be made to ascertain their identity and origin.

catalogued by: L. Chee
date: 20 August 2005

2.2.5b Envelope and letters (Details showing 2 out of set of 5 letters).





20th-n-1930

C,

In my sleep there were coffee beans roasting and the pungent
haze of a torrential downpour. We were in the old coffee
shop just around the corner from the Singapore Pavilion. It was the
first day of the monsoon. It was raining hard and we could barely hear
each other speak. So, we kept silent as we watched the tide of water wash
down an open drain. You hastily fashioned a boat from the morning's
newspaper. I made it after her and let it set sail on its maiden journey
down this miniature river. 'Don't' joined the flotilla of boats, lots of
balsa, loose beans, a plastic garaffe violently separate from a winking shell and a
string of white flowers that hung to the edge of our boat. The first was your favorite, the first's
sister. In their fallen state, they perfumed the air with a sweet
sweetness. Their fragrance smothered so many other odors like the stench
of injustice, insult and equator we had to find off daily on these soiled
streets. For this reason, jasmine smells melancholic to me. Your
enchanted flower dissimulates other worlds. And yet, for that one
unwinking moment, we were both wrapped in its little-sweet silence.
Then, as fast as it came, the sweetest breeze the air's away. 'Including
'Don't'.

Situated at the table by the peeling blue wall plastered with notices
for fairs, marriages, professions and the odd poem given by you to the
amusing Madam Law Lung, I watch you leave a small sigh of relief.
Were you glad to be rid of it all? 'Kathleen' was to see the last of my paper
offerings? Anyway, I don't want to make a scene at our table. It was
always right for you by Madam Law. For you, she made sure it had a
bouquet of fresh flowers waiting. Sometimes, it was perfectly perfect yellow
geraniums. Or orange marigolds. But in my dream, there was again a
perfect bowl of white jasmynes. Later, after the rain had stopped so
suddenly, we heard a different sound, of frogs rejoicing. I remember how
you used to refuse the heat but love the rain. It was as a balm for you,
as though the rain soothed your throat. You were able to wait and relax
more freely after each storm. I waited, said nothing until you had written
a few felicitous lines in your black notebook. Writing, let rain, released
your anxieties. I hated the rain. But for your sake, I prayed for it.

Later that day, I went into Monk and ordered two cups of coffee.
Placed, Regal in a well-tailored purple silk tunic and wearing her
reformed nose with equal dignity, Madam Law inquired after you. When
the Consul came back? I gave a polite smile as I filled the last
shot of sugar into the steaming but heavily stained porcelain cup.
Did they ever bother to wash these cups? The coffee was, as usual, too
sweet. I took these cups and left. I must have been unconvinced in my
reply. When I walked, she whispered to the next table that I was
reluctantly induced by that Westerner. Still, I do not care much for what
people say these days. Now they talk now is not much different from
what you were here with me. I am not sure who has been induced. Was it
I? Or you?



I wore my hair today twisted high in a flat-topped bun and covered it generously with white jasmine blossoms. I picked the flowers myself at dawn from our garden, just as they were at their fragrant peak. Can you smell them in my hair? I wanted to tell you how I hated your habit of running your fingers through my hair just when it was all neatly pinned. The jasmine here is growing too quickly. It's never been anything in its path. I had to disentangle the garden chair from its greedy grasp this evening. It looks like this here and I will wait in vain for you to rescue us. In any case, the hair is out of me. Do the Singapore women wear their hair in this way? Have you already taken me to your room at the Caffles Hotel? I have found a less painful way to be close to you.

I dare to inhabit the hotel you have just taken up residence. A grand place, some tell me, this Caffles Hotel. We both know that I have little chance of visiting you again. In many ways, this announcement must come as a relief to you, having exactly turned me away at the foot of Ceylon when I haunted your new house in Ceylon. After you sent me away, I waited for a month until there were no more tears left. But, I felt you were reluctant to let me go. Was I imagining? You once accused me of pathetically guarding over you. I was over-bearing, you said. I so possessed of you. But it was you who shooed me off when we walked the nocturnal streets. You were at pains to possess me. From the moment you gave me a name that was not mine, I am ending only through your words. I imply I love Miss. You invented me, like the poem. Perhaps I am, who were imagine another woman?

I hear that this hotel is as grand as the Strand, that both hotels are run by the same owner and there is already a kind of resemblance in the atmosphere even though they are separated by a sea journey. For someone who so despised the Strand's snobbery, I find it surprising that you have chosen into its sister hotel. I hear that your room overlooks a green garden area called the Palm Court. Is this true? Since finding out this, I have been unable to get the name out of my imagination. Palm Court. It sounds magical. But surely, it is not at all what I imagined it would be like.

You know how resourceful I can be. I managed to secure a picture of the Palm Court. It is a photograph on a page torn out from an old hotel guide. The only tobacco vendor around the corner from the Consulate passed it to me. As a gift, my sweet, he called out the 'I' suggestively smacking his rubbery lips at the same time. Apparently, his son works with Thomas Cook and elsewhere this father with such fascinating and useless sentences. He remembers you, I see, you must be lovely. He says he will keep copies and clippings of this hotel for me. I don't know how much I can get up with grace to get more information about the hotel. Anyway, the palm court looks disappointing. I think we have to do something about it, don't you? Allow me to reveal my thoughts on this matter slowly.

Since I have had the time to reflect quietly, I realized that our world together revolved around two intertwined materials. Words and weeds. The first belonged solely to you, those perfectly formed syllables, metaphors, metaphors for smells, sights, textures, tastes and sounds. I admired your art but it was not something I could share. As a poet, you were selfish. With weeds, it was a different story. I felt between us, a great possession. You had frequently used vegetation to inspire your poetry. I had long been told to grow them. And the plants we used in our art were used quite often, so you resembled. We agreed that weeds were ambiguously defined vegetation. Defined so by being in the wrong place. A precious plant to someone, a noxious weed to another person. And why? Shall you say of weeds, 'Plants that



grow in places where other plants should grow'. That was the thing about the well. It offended because it was matter out of place. Matter out of place. Like you, tell me, by coincidence or providence it is not extra, but it is charged me. Rangoon and you were conducted in places that were marked out uniquely by water - but well to place here. The plant, the well, out of place, would ultimately transform the place it occupied. To put the more attractive one in to its presence, the influence of the well on place becomes more discernible, more evident. These well spaces are totemic, sacred pilgrimage sites of our (our) life together.

At first, I had naively thought wells were of a certain size, a certain type of plant. But no. Plants that grow in places where other plants should grow. How right you are. They turn out to be of all sizes and shapes. They are minuscule and huge, common and rare. Sometimes subterranean. Other times a tree or a vine. The problem, or beauty, of wells was that they could only see made ruins, holes, porous spaces. When noticed, they would entangle the obscure visually and psychologically by drawing him or her into an intricate web of parallel lines, receding and gnarled. A floor covered in fine needles, a broken chair buried in moss and grass, flower spikes stubbornly pinned to the hem of a skirt.

As you once said of the Orient 'the human being is part of the landscape, and there is no discontinuity between him and nature'. I have listened to you talk, endlessly (sometimes also in your sleep) about the Orient, how you felt alienated here, even with me by your side. You did not live your dream for this infamous landscape. 'Something here, you said one day, seems to be in ruins and tearing itself apart, but in such strong elemental and living links you these appearances with almost secret and almost undying connections.' I think you understand that your perception of that simple reason between yourself and the great great place around you became intimate when you needed in the Orient. Wells offer a minute ground. Not perfect man made. Nature or Nature as god-given grandeur. But, natural out of place. A thing so engaging and palpable.

So, what is my plan, you ask? It is audacious but simple. The rest in you will not surprise. Rather I desire, with the poet.

It happens that one of the brothers of the Head Indragiri at the Pagoda has been called to work at the 'Raffles Hotel'. This young man, I, is very ambitious and hopes to rise to the very top in his profession. I want to know how long he will be his mother work as a clerk in the Consulate building. I was visiting my office clerk (rather too strictly I must add) and came across the Palm Court just now. Obviously proud of his own achievements and unable to contain his pleasure, he came to me and declared that his space (not wide) he much more in a few months, and the younger one, I, took up his new job. He was assistant gardener! And I, in the Raffles Hotel, he said. He said 'Remember not to forget to look up the garden when you do, she gleefully reminded. One thing led to another and I was put in contact with him. He plans leaving soon for Singapore. His credentials were good, and his letter bore a strong recommendation was a boon for the young gardener. When I told him about you, an eminent host whom I know well, who staying at the hotel, I became excited. He suggested I put you in touch with him. He said that since your room overlooks the Palm Court, he would make sure you had nice views. Was there anything more he could do? I said I would contact him before he leaves.

This is my plan...

It would be fascinating to 'cultivate' some of our seeds in the barren coast of yore. It would be like a miniature forest, many plants for you. On a growing thorn on your side. Liked say, a poplar to invite a cascade, sandal, rose, orange, laurel. Think of it as a memorial, an incantation, to tell an agitator, 'It is up to you.' Still I know it that you are not without of your plants in working under these barren circumstances. In my absence, these seeds will be your father, your grandfather, your grand, and I could name anyone else who might have the same sense of humor. I had given some thought to the practicality of the matter, and this is all I found in it. It is thinking you will need a little to carry out this project. In return, I will write him a poem for his motherland. He is waiting for him back in England. They are to be married eventually but in the meantime, there will be letters between them. One each week. I have volunteered you as to. He has accepted my offer. He every planting he sends out for you, you pay with words. Words are seeds. So really, it is surprising of what is up my sleeve. So, somewhat. But I tell him that you are going to be generous, you are a scientist, and that what he is given to plant will only bring fame to him, eventually, as he name will be bound up with yours.

So, the project is for you and me, through I, to introduce a network of users in both areas into this Hotel's Palm Court. We will make this space place as intense as the sum of our clandescent will - because haunts. In the coming letter, I will send you instructions and seek to enable this local Board pass them on to S. I have given him the impression that you are composing a kind of experimental poetry with the vegetation of the palm court and his role is in the incapacity of verbal collaboration. The thought of this brought a smug tone to the very idea. I also told him some of the island's wild life a little unusual. For poetic effect. To see my usual gardening practice, I must use most perfect labels for the seeds. I will prepare these labels. Pass them on to S. to apply. I have plans, if these are not one.

I am tingling with excitement. But I must not get carried away. Must catch the last boat before I go. So will wrap here and send the envelope. I pray this letter reaches you safely. It is a new start - a new garden to improve & make more magnificent waters before you. Even if you still despise me, can I not expect this nature, in

To all yours,

2...

P.S. I found a few wads of papers in your drawer quite recently. They were also a draft letter to Lafayette, dated, saying that it belonged to some of your parents, particularly. I am staring through the papers. They appear to be English letters, mostly half written. Some are rather good. (I have not yet coming in to read a half.) Some you will find that are pretty good. They shall be accompanying this will reach a letter. I will send them to you in the next three days.

30th-mii-1930

4.

Your boy, Thane, from the Consulate came yesterday to deliver a telegram. I thought I had the good fortune of receiving your reply. In itself is preferable to this deafening silence. (Even if you choose to ignore me, I hope the mimosa seeds have been handed to N). My excitement was, of course, short-lived and any expectation rudely impugned especially when the contents of the telegram were later revealed to me. It was from our dear son, now in Chile. Sebastian appears. Thane was anxious that the telegram would not fall into the wrong hands. He had cycled all the way here, forswearing his lunch break so he could pass this document to you. 'Please, for eyes of I love U,' he beamed English eclipsed by a toothless smile. Heads of meat gathered profusely on his upper lip. I couldn't bring myself to tell him I don't know if I could pass on this message to you personally.

Regard this as an obligation to Thine! next time I shall not
forward any more love letters, &c., although it might be already stale
news for you. Not to mention a waste of ink and paper here. Your boy
still maintains a loyalty to you but I cannot say the same of your
Latin love! The telegraphic to apologize her regrets at declining your
proposed marriage proposition since she recently married a respectable
gentleman. Two stringing out. Binding me and writing to another! Sweet
enough now to learn that even your words can fall on deaf (and
recently married) ears! Surely, you of all people, are capable of being
more generous?

Yesterday a thief broke in through the window while I was taking a nap. I had just spent a good two hours sorting out a bunch of letters you left behind, from Hector Landi, your dear Argentina and Annea Buragoja. Must have fallen asleep on the job. Didn't feel long but when I woke it was dark. Discovered the theft only this morning while dressing for work. This man (I assume it is 'he' from what was taken) made away with your entire wardrobe. Your whole collection of black pressed shirts, suits, trousers, sweaters. No more. Nothing else was taken. He didn't touch the jewelry you bought me. Obviously knew they cost nothing! But don't you find this burglary slightly strange? Not the trouble to take just your clothes? Perhaps you know the culprit? I secret admirer of your land-fied national sense?

Vanity, one of your weaknesses. Next, an insupportable compulsion to be so, so different from everyone else. A lot of resistance. Hated to wear white because it made you too indistinguishable from the colonials who had already snubbed you out of their clubs and hotels. I insisted on cohabitating with a Peruvian woman. Paraded your indifference by riding tailor gharries and dining in prohibited Peruvian coffee shops. Such notoriety! Outlasts your eight months in this city. Sometimes, I felt it was a burden you heaped upon us. I didn't mind being disregarded for who I was, a Peruvian woman alone, but it was really quite different when I was with you. I felt naked, humiliated, paraded. Even though you might have been on 'our' side, I was still a trophy. You were asphyxiated by colonial etiquette (I probably don't think much of anyone else, even the person you shared a home and a bed with. I know you felt insubstantial, voiceless (no one here could speak your native tongue). Not a man but a ghost wandering the streets. You say only too clearly, 'It happens I am tired of being a man.' This statement even made you miserable (Did a big ingotting why you're in the 'coffee house' you might to ingratiate yourself into society?). But it was truly selfish of you to

drag me into your little hell. You didn't see the rest of me, of the part of the mind that complaining the 'Caret' was because, how much you wanted to get away. But all the while you were creating your own private 'Caret'. Through me. Didn't it please you when I refused to adopt Western rituals? When I you staying your own dramatic wife? A poor thing in a land ravaged by age and parasitical vegetable growth, where everything for you was just, 'ghouls, worms - eaten'. If you are honest to you created part of this 'hell'. I think, for you can act, inspired perhaps by your own narcissism? (I've removed his picture from the desk, can't bear those piercing eyes and sultry expression!) Anyway, thankfully I am here, deaf to gossip, blind to boycotts on me. Because you're dig a hardy big hole and buried yourself out without me.

Now, what happened to the mincea seed? I'm mother tells me he son has moved his duties in the hotel's gardens. And that he is very happy. And you go to. You even to write since I've changed the tragic Albertina affair. In the meantime, I'm pleased to report a recent indulgence on my own 'Coffees' hotel fire.

I made a new acquaintance. A week ago, a middle-aged Englishman moved in next door. He came around to borrow sugar. Brought an excuse to introduce himself. C.M. Phillips heard that you'd gone 'under 4' as he put it, but he'd gone to Singapore and was at the 'Coffees' hotel. He said he was a headmaster of 'Coffees' boys' school, located just up the road from where you are staying. The mild-mannered head teacher told me that his love of fruit came from, 'chewing a fig in the bathroom'. The bullet hit it squarely between the eyes! Happened almost thirty years ago. Before I could call his heart, he produced evidence. A neighbour's warning for a few grams of sugar wouldn't bring proof! From a rusty tin box, Phillips pulled out a semi-transparent object. I immediately recognised what it was. It was the tip of the fig's tail, which he had promptly cut off and preserved as trophy. I kept

thinking of the dead tiger. He also flashed a yellowed newspaper report. It mentioned his name. Read it quickly. Failed to stir my amusement. The tone of the report made me. Sir Phillips took less notice than he hoped. Decided best to remain obdurate. Continued to listen with eyes.

The man seemed eager to share his opinions about the hotel. Out of my own curiosity, I gave no harm in letting him babble. Phillips hinted that the Palm Court is the best garden in the hotel. But, a curious place. He didn't say why. I let him continue. He said, it was a very exposed site and not very tropical even with the palm trees planted. And that he thought it wasn't advisable to hang around that garden too much. I inquired why not. 'Tiger's out too many for habits, the tiger tends to loosen and this is not entirely a fatal business.' Before he could elaborate, his business got was causing the roof next door. He took began to look sheepish, as though he had entered out of the house earlier than a scholarly. The neighbourly hat stopped there. He muttered 'MR PHILLIPS!' was not being embarrassingly announced to the entire street. It isn't the last we'll see of dear Sir 'Tiger' Phillips. I'm quite certain.

The business of the weed garden in the Palm Court, R. You have to put some effort into this. If you're working else, think of it as a suitable source of more inspired poetry. I know nothing matters more to you than that. How was your last poem? From what Phillips tells me, I think we need to plant in something that will give you some camouflage. I remember to him in a plant that wraps with leaves and flowers that grab hold of you. A perfect camouflage. You climb the morning glory house. We could always dash here through the house, into a hidden door, with scarcely a person in the street noticing.

When we found it, it had just been abandoned. There was a terrible fire. The house started and went. I slipped out in a hot and smoky street of nearly deserted houses. A perfect neighbourhood of dead houses. Each house, as usual, neatly painted.

showing off architectural treasures. Pediments, bay windows, ornate iron grilles. I remember that the owner himself had tragically perished with his young wife and daughter. Had he started it? No one on that quiet street knew them. No one buried deep in their own tiny perfect houses. The row of beautiful colonial houses disappeared by one. Then, we passed it again after a couple of weeks. The charred remains had disappeared under a forest of vines and flowers. Blue, pink, white, purple.

It immediately drew me to us. We went in. A great big space, half the roof gone. Eaten by the fierce tropical weather. But it was beautifully wrapped in morning glory vines, outside and in. They grew on the floors, up remaining columns, smothered walls like paper. They purred through half-rotting shutters, opened up doors and windows, which had once let in light, filtered laughter and a child's voice. There were still traces of that light. A light, a child's hand with a faint letter I and five other signs. We found three treasures wrapped in the vines. I remember you took out a handkerchief and carefully unwrapped each item. They were silver. Saved from plundering hands by vines. We found more things in the following weeks. No one lived there so we took these back with us. Give them a new home. I made careful drawings of them in pencil. The more you see, the more you want. Perhaps you will write me one day? We spent many hours there, usually until the last light when the fire was lit again. I showed you how to use the traces for a while. We found out that the vines in the garden were really extraordinary!

We returned again and again to that house even though it was on a hard street you disliked. The morning glory house made the other houses in the row even more miserable, fragile. A lady who lived on the same street for a long time said that the house had always been covered with the same flowers. It was just that now they were on the inside too. Here, you confirmed that your first ambition had

Part THREE

Flora

been to become an architect. If I didn't write poems, I would build houses, you declared. To me. To the empty house. To the flowers all around us, which would fade before I see. I sweat softly, terrified in these vine-covered walls. After that, I wondered what kind of house you would have built. A house that is porous, embracing, fragile, like this one maybe? Will I find the blueprints to this house in your poems, R?

Last week a dog running after his dog, fell down the steep bank behind our house. Wounded himself, though not badly. Fortunately, his dog rolled into the morning glory vine growing on the sign. It had cushioned his fall, slowed him down, entangled his small body in its leaves and purple flowers. No longer broken. He smelled rather nice when he was carried up. Still smiling, asked about his dog. The animal jumped to hear its name. I remembered the morning glory house when this happened. Thought it would be appropriate to plant this in your Palm Court. The seeds were collected from the morning glory house. I must soak them overnight and then quickly put them into the ground. To let them climb, you should help I to tie some string from the ground up towards your balcony. The handsome flowers will add much colour to your dear surroundings. Will also make the Leo happy.

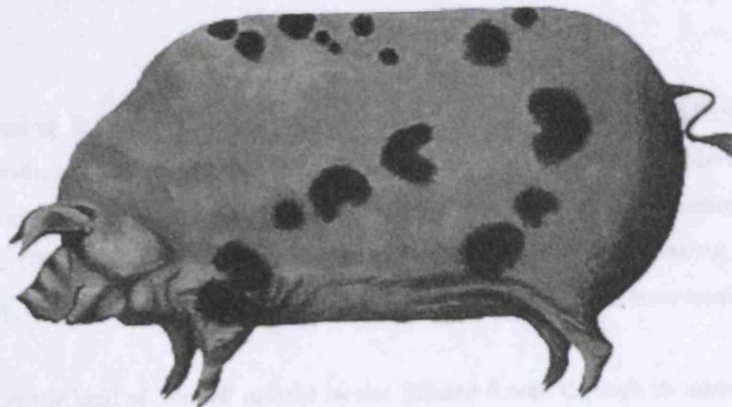
We haven't much time. Do not procrastinate with the deed, R. Until my next instructions, I trust you will at least communicate with I, if not also with me.

Z

p.s. Forgot to mention Lurgan didn't take your favourite leather shoes. Imagine he might come back sometime soon for these. Left them on the windowsill to save him the trouble of climbing in again.

Part THREE

Fauna



Model Creatures

The architectural model is central to the representation of an architectural idea. The model is, above all, concerned with the perfection of form. As Leonardo's 'Vitruvian Man' and Le Corbusier's '*Modulor*' suggest, architectural models are also androcentric. They are forms of perfection which can be collected, encased, admired and fetishized.

In this work, I investigate the relationship between the animal and the architecture of the Billiard Room at the Raffles Hotel through a collection of model billiard tables. The idea revives the mistaken rumour that a tiger was found under the billiard table in this room. In the present Billiard Room, the original table has apparently been kept for occasional use but is mostly only for display. This table currently functions as a model, embedding the idealized values of a masculine, colonial past.

By re-appropriating the model, which is one of the most important architectural tools for experimenting with, and ultimately to perfect, architectural form, these model tables are subject to similar formal experiments with the aim of revealing the 'Other' to the architectural space of the Billiard Room. The conventional categories of architectural model making, for example, materiality, scale, solidity, functionality and likeness, are subverted in these interventions.

I am intrigued by the kind of 'model' upheld by the Billiard Room through its association with the tiger, the snake, the pig and the wild boar.

Does this model promise *utilitas*, *firmitas* and *venustas*? Does this model have a gender?

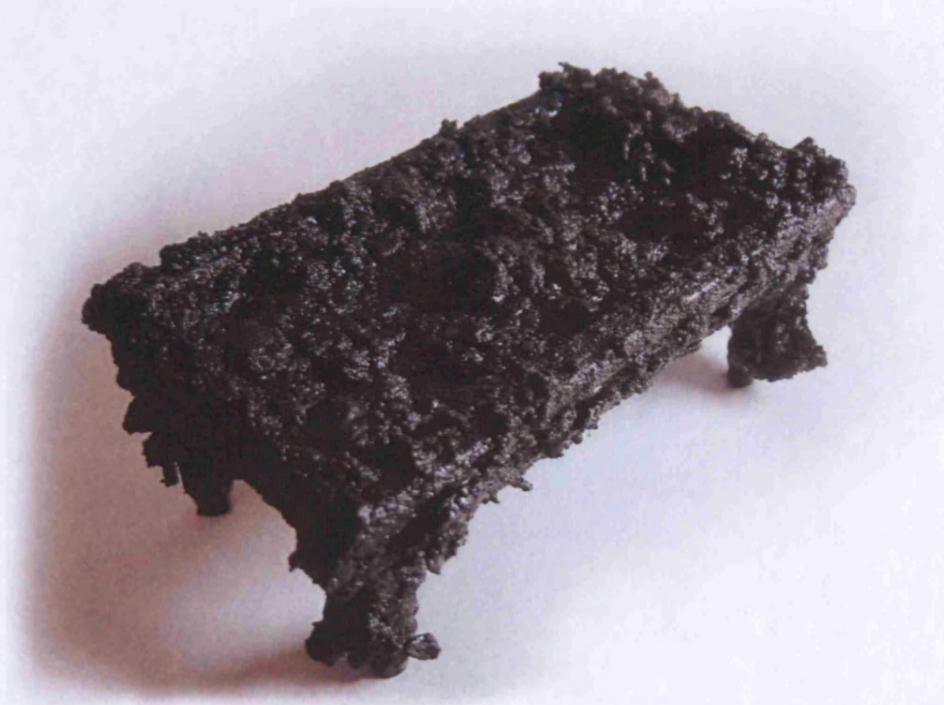
3.1.1a *White-Wash*

{ wooden table, 'white' undercoat primer, applied evenly four times over four days }



3.1.1b *Mud*

{wooden table, caked mud from garden, baked under sun for ten hours}



3.1.1c Stripes

{wooden table, 100% Cotton Print from *Liberty's* 'Indian Stripes' Collection glued on}



3.1.1d *Meat*

{wooden table, expired minced meat mixed with corn flour, table disposed due to stench}



3.1.1e Black Fur

{wooden table, black matted faux fabric fur glued on}



fauna

1

Encountering the Billiard Room

Through Animal Stories

The animal himself, however, is most elusive, and to arrange a meeting is a matter of some difficulty. To locate a tiger in a certain area is frequently fairly easy, but to get a shot or even catch a glimpse of him is quite another matter. [T]he visitor to Malaya in search of sport, whose time is limited, has very little chance of obtaining a tiger except by some lucky accident.¹

In a sport and motoring pamphlet published in the 1920s, a recognized authority on tiger-shooting in Malaya, Howard Henry Banks, reminded his readers that glimpsing a tiger in this region was usually a rare and elusive occurrence. Indeed Banks's opinion differs vastly from a journalist's who had, two decades earlier in 1903, reported confidently that, 'No sportsman in Asia should miss paying a visit to the Raffles, for he never knows what a rare bag may be picked up on the big verandah of a morning before breakfast'.² In four separate incidents occurring between 1902 and 1904 around the Billiard Room, the civilized scene of this colonial hotel was torn asunder by a succession of animals on the run – first, in 1902, an escapee tiger from a visiting circus, followed in

¹ Howard Henry Banks, 'The Tiger', in *Sport and Motoring in Malaya* (London: Malay States Information Agency, 1924), p.29.

² 'Boar Hunt at Raffles: Another Wild *Shikar* on the Hotel Verandah', in *The Straits Times*, 27 February 1903. *Shikar* is a Hindi word, meaning beast.

1903, by a snake and a wild boar, ending finally, in 1904, with a domestic pig who jumped off a wagon on its way to the slaughterhouse.

Apart from its association with the celebrated English writer and playwright W. Somerset Maugham, the hotel in the first quarter of the twentieth century was synonymous with these animals, particularly Stripes, a tiger who crept under the Billiard Room in the early hours of the morning on 12 August 1902. The tiger was spotted by a nervous hotel ‘boy’ who quickly raised the alarm. In no time, Mr. C. M. Philips, the head teacher of the Raffles Institution, a premier boys’ school located down the road from the hotel, was summoned from his bed. Philips had been to a fancy dress ball the night before at the Government House and was still nursing a hangover when he was called to the emergency. Dressed in his pyjamas, the head teacher proved to be a poor marksman as he aimed, fired and missed the tiger several times, hitting the brick pillars of the Billiard Room instead. After he finally killed the beast, the tiger’s body was dragged out by nervous bystanders from under the Billiard Room, originally a building raised off the ground. The entire saga was reported blow by blow in the leading local newspaper but there were neither photographs of the ill-fated tiger nor of the head teacher, who reputedly tore his coat in the event.³

From reading the newspaper report, one gets a sense that the reporter and the hotel crowd found Philips’s response slightly disappointing. The tone of the report veered towards poking fun at the head teacher. There was also clearly sympathy for poor Stripes, a runaway circus tiger who, probably terrified of the crowds, had kept himself out of sight in the dark undercroft space of the Billiard Room until he was rudely shot.

³ ‘A Tiger in Town: Shot at Raffles Hotel Under the Billiard Room’, in *The Straits Times*, 13 August 1902.

While Philips may have bagged himself a trophy, it is ironically Stripes who has been immortalized in the hotel today. Tiger lore thrives in the contemporary hotel. In the museum shop, there are cuddly tigers, t-shirts with tiger prints and tiger posters on sale. The Billiard Room today continues to honour the game with two old fashioned billiard tables, one of these marked as an original dating back to the time of Stripes' eventful visit. (Fig.3.1.2) Another part of the Billiard Room contains a bar serving cocktails, and an eatery popular for afternoon tea and dinner. At the bar, guests drink out of mugs emblazoned with a tiger motif, and patrons of the restaurant are given souvenir matchboxes. The matchbox features a stylized image of a tiger and a question 'Was there really a tiger under the billiard table?', which is a popular topic of conversation amongst guests and staff in the Billiard Room. (Fig.3.1.3) The tiger's visit has also inspired contemporary cartoons and illustrated children's stories, which may be browsed or bought from the hotel's shop. It has provoked tiger-themed billiard exhibition matches and more recently in 1986, during the hotel's centenary celebration, a live circus tiger re-enacted the 1902 event in the Billiard Room.⁴

Guests who want to learn more about the tiger incident are pointed to the hotel's museum. The animal visits leave a wide-ranging and eccentric 'archive', which constitutes an assortment of material collected across a period of almost a hundred years. Amongst the most interesting items on display are four animal accounts. One account involves Stripes, and the other three accounts revolve around three other animals – a pig, a boar, and a snake – who also found themselves near the Billiard Room not long after the tiger's visit. In 1903, a python was spotted coiled up near a potted palm on the

⁴ Roberto Pregarz, 'Tigers in the Tiffin Room', in *Memories of Raffles: 22 Years With a Grand Old Hotel* (Singapore: Treasury Publishing, 1990), pp.42-7.

verandah between the dining room and Billiard Room and again, caused much havoc amongst the guests. One of the guests shot at it but missed. The snake was finally captured by the hotel's gardeners and donated to the Singapore Botanic Gardens' menagerie.⁵ Aside from the four original newspaper reports, the museum also shows another early animal cartoon published in the London magazine *Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News*, which features the python chase.⁶ (Fig.3.1.4)



3.1.2 The Billiard Room today.

⁵ 'Python at Raffles: The Famous Tiger Hunt Recalled by a Snake Capture', in *The Straits Times*, 10 January 1903.

⁶ Gretchen Liu, *Raffles Hotel* (Singapore: Editions Didier Millet, 2006), p.67. Hereafter cited as Liu, *Raffles Hotel* (2006).

WAS THERE REALLY A TIGER UNDER THE BILLIARD TABLE?



3.1.3 Souvenir matchbox.



3.1.4 Python at the Raffles Hotel.



3.1.5 'A Legend Roars Back to Life'.

The boar and pig ‘hunts’ are more light-hearted affairs. On these two occasions involving the porcine species – the first in 1903, just a month after the python was spotted, involving a boar,⁷ and the second in 1904 involving a pig,⁸ frantic chases ensued around the Billiard Room, headed by the hotel’s conspicuously dressed and overweight watchman, fondly called the *jagah*. (see Fig.1.2.1) Today, the *jagah* who exudes in his impressive girth and grand costume an aura of old colonial charm, is arguably the hotel’s most photographed icon. In these last two animal incidents, it is the *jagah* who takes centre stage. Unlike the one-sided affection for Stripes, in these reports, there is sympathy for both the rotund watchman and his two overweight opponents who frantically and comically spar each other in a ‘fight to the death’.

As previously mentioned, one of the highlights of the hotel’s centenary celebrations in 1986 was the commemoration of the tiger in the Billiard Room. A white female Bengal tiger was rented from a visiting circus to pose on a billiard table with the hotel manager Roberto Pregarz, who was dressed in a beige safari suit in an attempt to mimic a colonial hunter. (Fig.3.1.5) To reflect the details of the 1902 event as accurately as possible, Pregarz had arranged for the head teacher of the Raffles Institution to be present but unfortunately the latter did not turn up. This re-enactment was reported in the local newspapers and recollected in Pregarz’s own book about his experiences in the hotel.⁹

⁷ ‘Boar Hunt at Raffles’.

⁸ ‘Great Hunt at Raffles: Terrible Struggle Between the Fat *Jagah* and a Fatter Pig’, in *The Straits Times*, 6 September 1904. *Jagah* is a Malay word, meaning watchman.

⁹ ‘A Legend Roads Back to Life’, in *The Straits Times*, 11 February 1986. This re-enactment is not recorded in the hotel’s private archives but appears in Pregarz’s book. For a discussion of the hotel’s archive, see *Empirical Contexts*, p.80, p.101.

A commemorative hotel monograph titled *Year of the Tiger* was commissioned for the centenary celebrations, which had been moved forward a year earlier to coincide with the Chinese zodiac's year of the Tiger.¹⁰ In this monograph, there are a selection of tiger-inspired cartoons and an advertisement announcing the opening of the Tiger Tavern, a drinking hole opposite the old Billiard Room where an exhibition match was played by snooker champions Warren Simpson Carbar and Ian Anderson, on one of the antique billiard tables with a stuffed tiger under it.¹¹ (Figs.3.1.6-3.1.7)



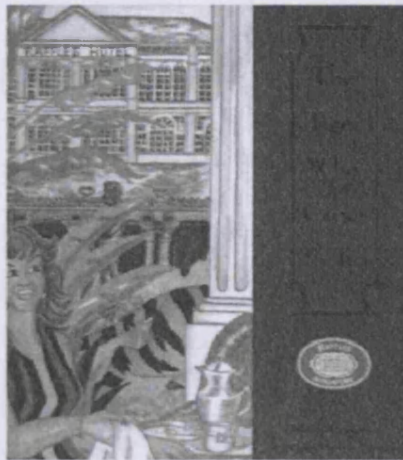
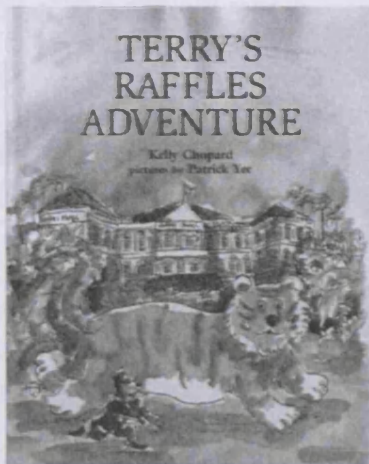
3.1.6 1980s advertisement announcing the opening of the Tiger Tavern.



3.1.7 1980s cartoon concerning the tiger and the Billiard Room.

¹⁰ Raymond Flower, *Year of the Tiger* (Singapore: Times Books International, 1985).

¹¹ Flower, *Year of the Tiger*, p. 25.



3.1.8 Two recent children's stories inspired by the tiger theme.



3.1.9 More cartoons around the tiger theme ...

After its refurbishment in 1991, contemporary promotional material for the newly re-installed Billiard Room drew enthusiastically on the early twentieth-century animal accounts. Gretchen Liu, the curator in charge of the Raffles Hotel museum, repackaged the ‘animal stories’ – a name Liu instinctively gave the bestial occurrences – as part of the hotel’s own contemporary bedtime fables selected from factual and fictional tales linked to the Raffles Hotel.¹² These bedtime tales were provocatively titled ‘Fables of the Exotic East: From the Raffles Hotel Collection’, thus, revivifying Maugham’s famous quip. More recently in 1995, a children’s storybook *The Tiger Who Came to Tea* by Kathy Creamer¹³ was commissioned by the hotel, and another illustrated children’s story by Kelly Chppard called *The Adventures of Terry the Tiger*¹⁴ was published a year later in 1996, thus introducing the animal accounts and the Billiard Room to a younger audience. (Fig.3.1.8) More cartoons were produced. (Fig.3.1.9) Today, the tiger incident continues to be circulated by word of mouth amongst travelers, guests, staff and the public, within and outside the boundaries of the hotel.

In *Fauna*, I investigate the intimate encounter of the Billiard Room through three animal accounts, namely that of the tiger, the pig and the boar. Leaving out the python, I choose to concentrate on the three other incidents because these are, in my view, more visceral in character, that is, they share an embodied relationship with two other subjects, namely the *jagah* and the head teacher. These accounts are also embedded in or around the space of the Billiard Room, and thus, instrumental to my own encounter of this architectural space. What makes these animal accounts architecturally fascinating? The

¹² These unpublished ‘bedtime stories’ were changed daily and placed, with a bar of after-dinner chocolate, on the bedside tables of the hotel rooms. A copy of this compilation is kept in hotel’s private archives.

¹³ Kathy Creamer, *The Tiger Who Came to Tea* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1999).

¹⁴ Kelly Chppard, *Terry’s Raffles Adventures*, illustrations by Patrick Yee (Singapore: Landmark Books, 1996).

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following section examines the critical perspective offered by the anecdotal evidence derived from the animals in the Billiard Room.

Animal Stories and Anecdotal Evidence

The most intriguing aspect of the animal archives is their anecdotal format. An acknowledgment of this awkward form is observed in a newspaper report from 1902, which was prefaced by the following statement:

A tiger was shot under the billiard room of Raffles Hotel early this morning. Lest any one be inclined to doubt the veracity of this foregoing statement, a representative of this paper, who saw the dead body of Stripes soon after he was shot, is prepared to bet a new hat that a live, loose tiger slept under the Billiard Room of Raffles Hotel last night ...¹⁵

As this reporter suggests, although they are factual, the anecdotal status of these animal accounts, both in the old newspaper reports and in the more recent animal-inspired texts, objects and events, give one the impression that they may be embellished facts, historical fabrications or part-truths. The ‘problem’ with the animal archives, historically, is that they feel like ‘stories’.

¹⁵ ‘A Tiger in Town’.

In one of his many memoirs recalling past adventures in Singapore, wild life expert, hunter, actor, circus performer, world traveller and animal provender Frank Buck – an American who maintained a Singapore compound with the largest private collection of life animals in one place and who was also a frequent patron of the Raffles Hotel in the interwar years¹⁶ – tells how the hotel's tiger story was so popular that different variations cropped up and anyone who visited the island was bound to hear at least one version. (Fig.3.1.10) 'Heaven help the writer who, seeking tiger tales, depends on what these gossips tell him. ... What actually happens in the tiger world is strange enough without the embellishments of imaginative natives'.¹⁷



3.1.10 Advertisement for 'Bring 'Em Back Alive'.

¹⁶ For biographical information on Frank Buck, see Frank Buck and Hugh Ferrin, *All in a Lifetime* (London: Jarrolds, 1942); Frank Buck and Anthony Edward, *Bring 'Em Back Alive* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1931). For Frank Buck's time in Singapore and details of his stay at the Raffles Hotel in the 1930s, see Julian Davison, 'Bring 'Em Back Alive', in *An Eastern Port and Other Stories* (Singapore: Topographica, 2004), pp.57-68. In From September 1982 – May 1983, a television series called 'Bring 'Em Back Alive' starring Bruce Boxleitner in the title role as Buck went on air in the United States. The series saw the fictional Buck based in the Raffles Hotel. See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bring_'Em_Back_Alive (Accessed on 24 May 2006).

¹⁷ Buck and Anthony, *Wild Cargo*, p.203.

Grounding his reports on the factual solidity of the architectural space, on what is undeniably ‘there’ in the hotel, Buck suggests, ‘There is no questioning that a tiger was found in the old billiard room at the Raffles Hotel’, and adds that, ‘it would have been a simple matter for a tiger ... to stray into the Raffles billiard room, which was then a big open space, with no doors or windows, on the ground floor’.¹⁸ He proceeds to skeptically recount three versions of the tiger story, which I cite here in verbatim:

One of the stories they tell you with a straight face is that the Chinese boy who came to clean up the room at six in the morning had found the tiger asleep on a billiard table and had prodded it with a cue. I thought the native waiter who told me this story was joshing, and my response to it was a hearty laugh. I soon saw I had offended him and pretended to believe the story. [C]an you imagine anyone crazy enough to jab a tiger with a billiard cue? [A]nother version (the story of one of those eye-witnesses, who, it later developed, wasn’t even in Singapore at the time) is to the effect that the tiger, in his rush to get out of the room, knocked over the Chinese boy and made a dash for the kitchen. There, so the yarn goes, the animal helped himself to half the beef which he dragged out on the porch, where he parked himself and ate his meal. ...

Mr Aratoon, the manager of the hotel, with whom I discussed this Singapore legend, offers the only sensible explanation. Unquestionably, he tells me, a tiger had entered the billiard room. Three reliable people had seen the animal make its escape. The big cat, he believes, reached the island shortly before dawn. Bewildered by its surroundings, it had dashed from street to street in an effort to

¹⁸ Buck and Anthony, *Wild Cargo*, p.203.

find a way out. Seeing the open space on the ground floor of the hotel, it had entered, hoping that perhaps this would lead to open country. [W]hen the boy entered to clean the room, the animal was probably pacing up and down wondering what to do next. Seeing the boy, the beast's first thought would be to escape doubtless then it made its dash to safety.¹⁹

In his account, Buck begins with what he takes to be the immutable facts of the Billiard Room – a simple open space on the ground floor, which momentarily housed the tiger. But in the first story Buck tells, the tiger is no longer 'factually' placed under the Billiard Room as we gathered from the newspaper report of 1902, but found inside the room itself on the billiard table. In the second story, the tiger is located in the kitchen, before subsequently landing up on the hotel porch, where it is reported to have enjoyed a joint of meat. The precise structure of the old Billiard Room, which we know from architectural drawings and the first newspaper report to be a pavilion-like space raised on brick pillars, is confusingly rendered here. It is hard to imagine how the tiger could have rushed into what is essentially a space raised off the ground, mistaking a roofed structure for 'open country', since to get into the Billiard Room it would have had to deliberately leap upwards to make its entry, failingly which, we must assume that the tiger is accustomed to taking the stairs in his own natural habitat!

Even as he admonishes against the practice of making things up, Buck himself engages in this activity as he tell us these stories. He anticipates the 'beast's first thought', tells his readers what the tiger would have experienced and imagines how it would have acted. In Buck's versions, the tiger appears not to have been shot. There is also strangely no

¹⁹ Buck and Anthony, *Wild Cargo*, p.203.

mention of the colonial headteacher who killed the tiger. As a wildlife bounty hunter himself, one begins to wonder if Buck did not persist in getting to the ‘bottom’ of this story, and if he did not actually learn of the other ‘hunter’ (Philips) who unceremoniously shot the tiger, or if Buck himself was also fabricating stories for the benefit of his readers.

Taking Buck’s stories as an example, I argue that the architectural specificities of the Billiard Room are held ransom by the fluctuating details of the story and the storyteller, depending on which version you hear and who you hear it from. In the Billiard Room, the telling of animal stories constructs an emancipative space of engagement for this experiencing subject. It is not that these stories abolish the need for historical facts. Instead, they provoke critical inquiry into architectural history beyond the limits of the hotel’s emergent architectural narrative, which I have argued, focuses on architectural form and remains uncritical to the implications of adopting an architectural history modeled after patriarchal colonial accounts.²⁰

Even though ‘animal’ and ‘story’ are two terms, that in my view, work against the enterprise of normative architectural history, and are unlikely to be included if one thinks about architectural texts conventionally ascribed to this National Monument, I argue that the ‘animal story’ plays an intransigent role in the architectural history and representation of the Billiard Room. The Billiard Room, which opened in 1896, existed almost anonymously for at least six years before it captured the public’s imagination in 1902 with the entry of the first animal, the tiger. After the last animal, the pig, made its departure in 1904, its reputation flourished and there was occasion to expand and rebuild an entirely new structure, which was completed in 1907. Thereafter, within a

²⁰ See *Empirical Contexts*, pp.99-109.

decade, the space had fallen out of favour and was converted into bedrooms in 1917. The Billiard Room was not reinstalled until the 1989 restoration. However, as demonstrated by the growing animal archive, the non-existent 'Billiard Room' was still a point of interest for those visiting the hotel. In the intervening seventy years, the hotel's Billiard Room effectively existed as an accessory to its animal fables. It is even arguable that this space has remained so enigmatic because its 'story' form outlives and exceeds its architectural narrative.

I suggest that a close reading of these animal anecdotes reveals an understanding of the Billiard Room, which is different from more conventional architectural narratives such as the hotel's emergent architectural history, discussed previously in Part One. The building's conservation documents and heritage publications, which define the key aspects of this National Monument, recognize the Billiard Room as significant insofar as it is part of the architect's design.²¹ In addition to this architect-centred interpretation, the hotel's historians, Ilsa Sharp, Raymond Flower and Gretchen Liu, all point out that men outnumbered women at the Raffles Hotel in the first half of the twentieth century, and the installation of a Billiard Room unquestionably catered for the leisure pursuits of this dominant male population. For example, Sharp mentions that Singapore in the early 1900s had 'a preponderance of the male sex and consequently keen competition for female companionship'.²² Flower writes that the atmosphere of the Bar and Billiard Room at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was filled with 'regimental

²¹ The 'architectural history' produced as part of the hotel's preservation guidelines by the government bodies in charge of conservation of historical buildings (Singapore Urban Redevelopment Authority and Preservation of Monuments Board) focus only on formal architectural elements. See *Raffles Hotel Preservation Guidelines* (Singapore: Urban Redevelopment Authority and Preservation of Monuments Board, June 1997), pp.44-6 (Vol.1), pp.54-60 (Vol.2).

²² Sharp, *There is Only One Raffles*, p.18.

offices (congregating) around the billiard tables' and 'ships' captains swapping tall tales with planters over their brandy-and sodas'.²³ Liu notes that the hotel attracted British tin miners and planters from Malaya, and in 1914, the hotel advertised itself as 'The Rendezvous of Planters'. She emphasizes that Singapore social life in the early 1900s revolved around the large male population, 'men of all races outnumbered women' and 'European merchants congregated in bars and billiard rooms, or the men-only Town Club'.²⁴ In her travel diary, Mrs Anne Thring, a British traveler who visited the hotel with her husband in 1912 also records that 'there are few women and fewer ladies, but lots of men here'.²⁵ In taking a non-critical stance towards its patriarchal colonial history, the hotel's emergent architectural history implicitly locates the Billiard Room firmly within a masculine locus.

If it is a common assumption that the hotel was a renowned colonial establishment, and that hunting and billiards were favourite colonial pastimes, why is there cause to suggest that the animal anecdote may reveal a contrary argument? I am especially interested in how the anecdotal animal archive intervenes with the architectural narrative of the Billiard Room. A close reading of these animal stories delineates contradictory gendered perspectives of the Billiard Room, which begin to fracture the architectural meanings of the masculinized space laid out by the hotel's emergent architectural history. The following section examines the masculine construct of the Billiard Room, and discusses the hotel's famed site through its architectural history.

²³ Flower, *Year of the Tiger*, pp.8-9.

²⁴ Liu, *Raffles Hotel* (2006), p.47, p.75

²⁵ C. H. M. Thring, *The Trials and Pleasures of an Uncompleted Tour* (London: Simpkin, Marshall and Co., 1914), p.236.

The Billiard Room: Entering A Masculine Domain

When Tigran Sarkies, the founder of Raffles Hotel, took over Beach House in 1887, there was no Billiard Room. However, the popularity of billiards as a gentlemen's game at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries probably made an urgent impression on the hotelier who commissioned Bidwell, the hotel's architect, to design and construct a purpose-built Billiard Room. Sarkies would also have been aware of rival hotels like de L'Europe and Adelphi, which advertised their billiard rooms as a major feature. The fashionable trend of having a Billiard Room on hotel premises is observed in historical postcards and photographs issued in the early twentieth century, which show the billiard rooms at these two rival hotels and also at lesser-priced establishments like the Sea View Hotel and the Hotel van Wijk.²⁶

Billiards was a popular game in the Victorian and Edwardian era, which historically coincided with the period when the hotel's Billiard Room was fully operational between 1890 and 1917. The first Billiard Room, which witnessed the animal visits, formerly stood apart as a separate block raised on brick pillars at the corner of Beach Road and Stamford Road. Designed by Bidwell as part of his grand new scheme for the hotel, this first Billiard Room opened in 1896 and boasted possession of 'four English tables'.²⁷ (Fig.1.2.11 & Fig.3.1.11) In terms of design, there was nothing extraordinary about this

²⁶ Old postcards from the Singapore National Archives and the Raffles Hotel's private archives. Views of billiard rooms at the Adelphi and Seaview are reprinted in Liu, *Raffles Hotel* (2006) p.74.

²⁷ An early newspaper report announcing the opening of the new Raffles Hotel also promises a 'large and commodious billiard room containing four tables'. See 'A New Hotel in Singapore', in *The Straits Times*, 19 September 1887.

space. It was functionally constructed to cater for the game, and the raising of the structure on brick pillars ensured a level floor for the billiard tables.

By 1906, the popularity of the first Billiard Room necessitated a new larger building. This space had become a sought after accommodation not only for the game of billiards but presumably also as the infamous location where one of the last tiger shootings in Singapore was witnessed. Architects Tomlinson and Lermitt were engaged for the new design. The original building was razed to the ground and a new 'handsome and commodious one' measuring '55 feet by 72' was erected in its place 'not only (to) meet the demands for billiards, but ... (to) provide better accommodation for those who enjoy the open air, and the exhilarating breeze that comes from the sea in the vicinity of the Raffles Hotel ...'.²⁸ (Fig.3.1.12) The architects provided a generous verandah at the front, which faced Beach Road and the sea. Two new billiard tables were added to the existing four tables, and the Billiard Room established itself as one of the hotel's key spaces in the early twentieth century. Advertisements and postcards displayed its familiar façade and proudly highlighted its accommodations. (Figs.3.1.14-3.1.15)

Although corridors and verandahs linked this new Billiard Room, which opened in 1907, to other parts of the hotel, the pavilion was conceived as a self-contained structure. In terms of scale, the single storey building was diminutive in comparison to other parts of the hotel. With pitched roofs and airy verandahs on all four sides, the pavilion was modeled after the Anglo-Indian detached bungalow.²⁹ The new Billiard Room was still

²⁸ 'Raffles Hotel: New Billiard Room to be Constructed and Other Improvements Made', in *The Straits Times*, 9 October 1906.

²⁹ Anthony D. King, *The Bungalow: The Production of a Global Culture* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984), pp.41-59.

raised but the undercroft space where the runaway circus tiger had hidden was sealed off. Also, the older distinctive gable-fronted space with its bold announcement of 'Bar & Billiard Room' was replaced with a frilly cast-iron verandah. However, by 1917, demand for rooms overwhelmed the popularity of the game and the prospect of big game hunting in Singapore diminished. The Billiard Room was converted into guest bedrooms in 1917. It was only formally reinstalled when the hotel was restored in 1989.

RAFFLES HOTEL,
SINGAPORE

Stands unrivalled as the Finest Hotel in the East.
Beautiful Sea Frontage.

Sets of Rooms with bathrooms attached.
Kitchens, Commo. and Apts.
Electric Light Electric Gas, Hot & Cold Electric Fans

Dining Rooms with marble floors, capable of
accommodating 500 Guests.

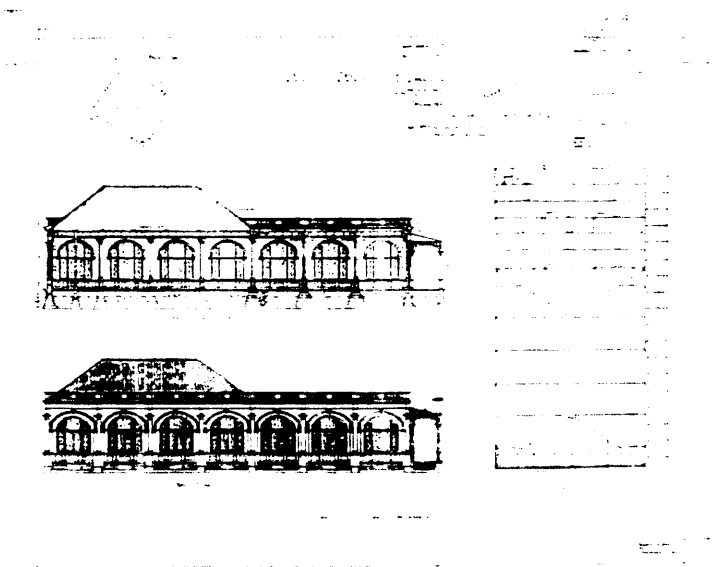
EXCELLENT CUISINE BY FRENCH CHEFS

Bar and Billiard Room in separate block—First English Tennis.

For more particulars apply to RAFFLES HOTEL, 11, RAFFLES PLACE, SINGAPORE.

BRANCHES
RAFFLES TOTTEN HAMMERS RAFFLES SQUARE SINGAPORE
EASTERN & ORIENTAL HOTEL PENANG
STANLEY HOTEL KUALA LUMPUR

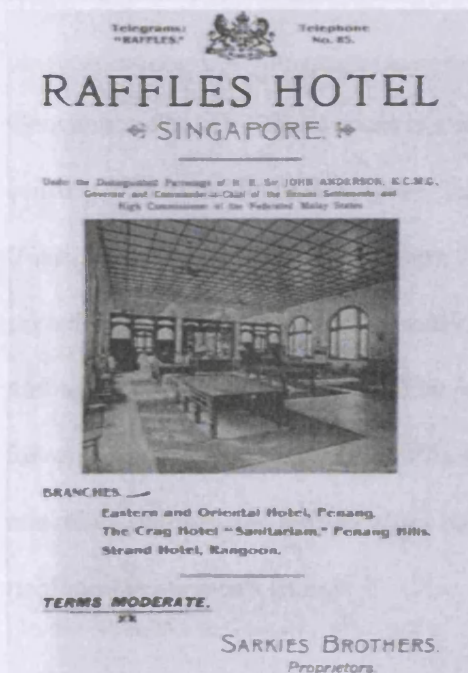
3.1.11 Advertisement in *The Singapore and Straits Directory*, c.1905.



3.1.12 Architectural drawings for the new Billiard Room by Tomlinson and Lermitt, c.1906



3.1.13 View of the new Billiard Room (left) and Beach Road (right), c.1910.



3.1.14 Advertisement in *The Singapore and Straits Directory*, 1909.



3.1.15 Postcards of the Billiard Room with cast iron verandah, c.1910.

Although the overall plan of the restoration exercise in 1989 was to mirror its 1915 architectural composition, the decision to restore the Billiard Room warrants special mention. Converted into bedrooms in 1917, the Billiard Room's popularity was already beginning to decline by 1915. The decision to restore the Billiard Room as a key space in this contemporary National Monument is thus, not without irony since the significance of this space ostensibly lies, I argue, not in its architectural composition but as a result of its animal-related history.

Conventionally, the billiard room is a male domain. In his chronicles of mid nineteenth-century expatriate life in Singapore, John Cameron, the editor for newspaper *The Straits Times* noted that billiard rooms were frequently attached to respectable residences and served as sanctuaries for the host and his male friends to retire after dinner, with a cigar and a glass of sherry in hand.³⁰ The fashionable trend for billiards at the Raffles Hotel followed the rise of the game in Edwardian England where as a popular middle-class masculine pastime, the billiard room had become an essential feature of the houses of the rich³¹ and gentlemen's clubs.³²

³⁰ John Cameron, *Our Tropical Possessions in Malayan India* (London: Smith, Elder and Co., c.1865, reprint Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1965), p.303.

³¹ See for example, Rawdon Crawley, *The Billiard Book* (London: Ward, Lock, & Co., 1877), p.1; Sidney Gillett, *The Earlier History of Billiard Tables and Accessories as seen from the Sales Journals of John Thurston 1818-1843* (London: Thurston & Co. Ltd., 1996), p.7.

³² See for example, F. R. Cowell, *The Athenaeum: Club and Social Life in London 1824-1973* (London: Heinemann, 1975), p.36; Anthony Lejeune, *The Gentlemen's Clubs of London* (London: Parkgate Books Ltd., 1984). Club historian Anthony Lejeune states that at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, billiard rooms were found in the Eccentric Club, the Junior Carlton Club, the Arts Club, the National Liberal Club, White's and the Savile Club, amongst others. For a gendered architectural history on London clubs, see Jane Rendell, 'The Clubs of St James's – Public Patriarchy', in *The Pursuit of Pleasure: Gender, Space and Architecture in Regency London* (London: Athlone, 2002), pp.86-103. For a contemporary perspective on the masculine setting of London clubs, see Barbara Rogers, *Men Only: An Investigation into Men's Organizations* (London: Pandora, 1988), pp.165-99.

The billiard room represented a vital aspect of club life, both in London and in outstation clubs overseas. Jane Rendell reminds us that clubs were associated with ‘the consolidation of bonds between public men through the physical and ideological exclusion of women’ through patriarchy, ‘as well as the contestation of rivalries between certain male groups’ through fratriarchy.³³ Although the satellite clubs in British colonies like Singapore – outstations to London’s Pall Mall and St James’s Street where many clubs were found – were housed in more modest settings, their ideological sentiments and key symbolic spaces remained more or less intact.

Inside, The Club was a teak-walled place smelling of earth-oil, and consisting of only four or five rooms, one of which contained a forlorn ‘library’ of five hundred mildewed novels, and another an old and mangy billiard table – this, however, seldom used, for during most of the year hordes of flying beetles came buzzing around the lamps and littered themselves all over the cloth.³⁴

As described above, George Orwell’s novel *Burmese Days* revolves around a central location – an earth-oil scented club in the colonial outpost, with two key spaces – the library and the billiard room. Like its London counterparts, this club was unreservedly the haunt of male civil servants. Although it was a small and unremarkable building, Orwell’s ‘Club’ featured significantly as the locus of deceit, mayhem and gossip in the novel. In a similar way, Sharp has suggested that the Raffles Hotel also functioned like a club to the British expatriate community, where in 1911, male residents in Singapore

³³ Rendell, ‘The Clubs of St James’s’, p.63.

³⁴ George Orwell, ‘Burmese Days: A Novel’, in *The Complete Works of George Orwell*, Vol.2 (London: Secker and Warburg, 1986), p.17.

outnumbered women residents by eight to one, and the majority of those staying in the hotel were bachelors.³⁵ The hotel acting as a kind of men's club with the Billiard Room as its social centre, brought together a community of British civil servants, army officers, tin miners, planters, businessmen and explorers who shared social, political, economic and cultural interests, and usually also, complementary ideological backgrounds.³⁶

The significance of the Billiard Room's animal accounts was further boosted by its tropical geographical location, renowned for teeming wild fauna at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.³⁷ Hunts for wild animals in Singapore were attractive because substantial monetary rewards were offered for the capture of wild animals and the gruesome remains of unfortunate human victims provided sensational material for dramatic reports.³⁸ For example, in Charles Burton Buckley's *Anecdotal*

³⁵ Sharp, *There is Only One*, pp.38-41; pp.96-115. Occupancy statistics from Liu, *Raffles Hotel* (2006), p.46.

³⁶ See Sharp, *There is Only One Raffles*, pp.38-44; Liu, *Raffles Hotel* (2006), pp.46-50. The Oriental Club in London, for example, was set up by the Royal Asiatic Society in 1824 to cater for civil servants and British people who had served in, resided or traveled to, and thus, shared a common interest in the East. See Denys Forrest, *The Oriental: Life Story of a West End Club* (London: B. T. Batsford, 1979), pp.26-7.

³⁷ Hunting wild animals for leisure is mentioned as a key feature in British government immigration handbooks and colonial travel guides to the Malayan States and the Straits Settlement. See for example, *Federated Malay States (with a chapter on the Straits Settlements from 1904-): General Information For Intending Settlers*, Issued by the Emigrants' Information Office (London: HMSO, 1900-1915). (Archive: Royal Commonwealth Society Library at University of Cambridge); Arnold Wright and H. A. Cartwright, *Twentieth-Century Impressions of British Malaya* (London: Lloyd's Greater Britain Publishing, 1908), pp.559-61.

³⁸ For historical accounts of tiger hunts and specialist clubs formed for the sport in colonial Singapore, see for example, Charles Burton Buckley, *An Anecdotal History of Old Times in Singapore* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, c.1902, 1984), for example, p.566, p.622, pp.709-10; Cameron, *Our Tropical Possessions*, pp.90-107; Song Ong-Siang, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1984), pp.58-61; 'Beast a Burden: Tigers Took a Heavy Toll', in *Singapore Chronicles: A Special Commemorative History of Singapore* (Singapore: Singapore Tatler, 1995), pp.142-5; Julian Davidson, 'The Gentleman in Stripes', in *One for the Road and Other Stories* (Singapore: Topographica, 2001), pp.45-59. For cultural studies on the symbolism of tigers in Southeast Asian culture, see for example, Robert Wessing, *The Soul of Ambiguity: The Tiger in Southeast Asia* (Northern Illinois University: Centre for Southeast Asian Studies, 1986), pp.1-23; Peter Boomgaard, *Frontiers of Fear: Tigers and People in the Malayan World, 1600-1950* (New Haven: Yale

History of Old Times in Singapore, a key historical document and chronicle recording Singapore's early colonial social and cultural history, tiger stories were liberally sprinkled throughout the book, 'From time to time in this book some of the best known tiger stories will be told in their turn ...'.³⁹ In Buckley's book, references to tigers were made from 1831 to 1867, the final year marking the end of these chronicles. Interestingly, one of the first tiger sightings on the island in 1835 was allegedly made by Singapore's first architect, George Drumgold Coleman. Coleman was pounced upon by a tiger when he was surveying an area of thick vegetation.⁴⁰

Given the general hunting interest of Singapore's male population and the high proportion of male residents at the hotel, it is unsurprising that the most famous and spectacular tiger scene was recorded under the hotel's social hub, the Billiard Room, in 1902. However, my interpretation of these animal accounts as an 'architectural time-out-of-joint' forefronts the gendered implications of these animal anecdotes, which I argue, significantly deviates from conventional colonial hunt narratives. Here, two points challenge hunting narratives, which normally emphasize the hunter's heroic exploits and give concrete evidence of his bounty. First, the animal archive is not based on a 'proven' account as there are no actual photographs or taxidermic specimens, which can support

University Press, 2001). Boomgaard briefly discusses the history of Singapore's tiger menace and gives special mention to the tiger in the Raffles Hotel, which he understands was *under* the billiard table, see Boomgaard, *Frontiers of Fear*, p.102-3, p.140. For an account of the tiger menace's impact on local economies in mid nineteenth-century Singapore, see C. M. Turnbull, *A History of Singapore: 1819-1988* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp.44-5. Tiger accounts and other hunting adventures were frequently mentioned in nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century travellers' diaries, see for example, compilations by John Bastin (ed.), *Travellers' Singapore: An Anthology* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp.63-4, pp.107-8; Michael Wise and Mun Him Wise (eds.), *Travellers' Tales of Old Singapore* (Singapore: Times Books, 1985), pp.44-9, p.52, pp.90-3, pp.181-3.

³⁹ Buckley, *An Anecdotal History*, p.221.

⁴⁰ Buckley, *An Anecdotal History*, p.219.

the exploits recorded in the Billiard Room. The animal stories are instead anecdotal. Recent recitations inspired by the original animal accounts continue to preserve this anecdotal format, for example, narrating the account through children's stories and cartoons. Items like the souvenir matchboxes issued at the present day Billiard Room encourage unregulated conversation and solicit new anecdotes. Second, the animal archive, that is, both the historical newspaper reports and particularly, the more recent tiger-inspired artifacts, images and texts, fracture the heroic image of the colonial hunter with humour and skepticism, and in doing so, highlight the latter's fallibility.

I propose that the architectural formation of the Billiard Room is founded on the anecdotal and the anti-heroic animal stories, that is, on qualities antithetical to this National Monument's colonial epistemology. These anecdotal animal accounts suggest indeterminacy, excess, subjectivity and irregularity. They galvanize a subversive feminine turn, which critically questions and undermines the architectural meanings of the Billiard Room based on unyielding patriarchal values. Through an intimate encounter with these animal stories, *Fauna* attempts to reveal the ruptures within this seemingly unambiguous colonial masculine space, arguing that the Billiard Room is a contested territory significantly underpinned by repressed feminine foundations.

In my intimate encounter with the Billiard Room, the billiard table is a key object, something I call the intimate detail. Although the tiger was originally reported to have hidden and was shot under the Billiard Room, the rampant word-of-mouth circulation of the incident fueled by intense public interest quickly distorted this architectural fact. Like the stories told by Buck, reports began to point out that the tiger was found under the

billiard table, and even on the billiard table itself.⁴¹ These reports were all the more confusing given that some of them emanated from the hotel itself. For example, Flower wrote in the hotel's 1986 centenary commemorative volume that the head teacher Philips saw the tiger under the billiard table, 'and fired three rapid shots, only to demolish one of the legs, and to bring the table down with a crash'.⁴² On another occasion also in 1986, Pregarz, the hotel's manager, placed the rented circus tiger brought in to celebrate the Year of the Tiger on top of the billiard table, thus, embellishing the mistake made by Flower, and confounding further the facts of where the tiger was actually located.⁴³

The distortion of the 'architectural fact' facilitated by the detail of the billiard table is key to my intimate encounter with the Billiard Room. Through a conceptual repositioning of the tiger in relation to the billiard table, the formation of architectural knowledge shifts from an emphasis on immutable and controlled facts, be they about architectural form, history or masculine meanings of the Billiard Room towards the unregulated potentials of the animal anecdote, transmitted and received by different experiencing subjects who encounter this space. I suggest that the Billiard Room's architecture is galvanized by the billiard table, which reveals an 'animal plot' suggestive of the architectural concept of 'overturning', which I will now elaborate.

⁴¹ 'A Tiger Alarm', in *The Straits Times*, 17 September 1902. The first sentence of this report stated: 'The recent tiger incident in which one of these "terrors of the jungle" was shot beneath one of the billiard tables at the Raffles Hotel seems to have warmed up the fears and apprehensions of certain members of this community'.

⁴² Flower, *Year of the Tiger*, p.20.

⁴³ Pregarz, 'Tigers in the Tiffin Room', pp.42-7.

Under the Table, Overturning the Billiard Room: The Intimate Detail and the Animal Plot

There are two antique billiard tables in the present Billiard Room. They are both in good working order, and occasionally a game is played on them. However, games are rarely played nowadays and these tables are displayed more as a symbolic gesture. One of them is affixed with a tiny label on its underside, which confirms that it is an original piece, dating back to the tiger's visit in 1902. As the last historical artifact remaining in this space connected to the tiger incident, this table is a seductive object. It has an imposing presence in the now much reduced-in-size Billiard Room. It is an object, which this experiencing subject feels drawn towards, onto which she can 'hook' her imagination of the tiger and this room. It is an intimate detail, which allows her to inhabit the anecdote of the tiger.

On my first visit to the Billiard Room, the billiard table smelt of lemon wax polish. It was temptingly tactile. I felt the urge to touch the table, to examine it for scratches and clues from that morning in 1902. I immediately went to peer under the table. I am certain that what I did was not unique. Many visitors come to the Billiard Room on the account of its association with the tiger. These visitors would have read accounts about the tiger, shot, factually, under the floorboards of the once raised Billiard Room, but often erroneously circulated, as killed under the billiard table instead. Now, both locations – under the Billiard Room and under the billiard table – share almost equal significance in discussions pertaining to the infamous tiger's whereabouts.⁴⁴ As it is no longer possible to check under the Billiard Room – the undercroft space was sealed off in

⁴⁴ Notably, only the hotel's present management is at pains to point out the exact location of the tiger in relation to this architectural monument.

the 1906 renovations – the obvious place to look for evidence of the tiger is, of course, under the table.

The billiard table is an intimate detail that offers another way of restructuring the architectural experience of the Billiard Room. An understanding of this space conducted through the billiard table shifts the construction of architectural knowledge from the architect, the building and the architectural historian wishing to stick to undisputed facts, to the experiencing subject, whose knowledge is instead predicated on the ambiguous, that is, concerned with the multiple possibilities of questions such as, ‘*Where* was the tiger? *Who* said it was there?’

The billiard table makes me wonder about what it means for someone to look under the table, to look in the ‘wrong’ space, to know this space through distorted architectural information about the tiger’s whereabouts. Like the ‘punctum’, the billiard table ‘pricks’ me because it operates following the distortion of this ‘architectural fact’. It makes me think about how someone looking erroneously under the table may actually understand the Billiard Room in a different way from someone else who is in possession of the accurate architectural facts. The perspective of the room from ‘under the table’ is upside down. It challenges what is upright, normal and orderly. Something that is ‘under the table’ can also be hidden or repressed. To turn the tables on someone or something suggests a reversal of fortunes and positions.

The notion of what happens above the table, what is above board, as opposed to what takes place under it, what is transgressive, is adopted as a metaphor for reinvigorating the architectural subject matter of the Billiard Room through an intimate encounter. The

ambition here is to suggest why and how the architectural perspective from ‘under the table’ may transform the Billiard Room’s architectural discourse and history.

The billiard table is, first and foremost, an upright artifact. It is a piece of furniture whose craft and precision lie, ostensibly, on its upper surface. It is *on* the table where all the factors that might determine the success of a game are at stake. The best tables were fitted with thick slate slabs and covered with a superfine green wool cloth. The inner edges of the table were fitted with galvanized rubber cushions, which were also covered in wool cloth.⁴⁵ The cloth and the slate bed offered the least possible friction and controlled an optimum speed for the billiard ball when it was struck. The upper surface of the table required careful attention and constant maintenance. It had to be set absolutely level. The distance between the floor to the top of the cushions should measure approximately three feet.

To keep a table in good order it should be brushed and ironed daily. The cloth should be brushed in the direction of its nap, and the dust swept into the pockets. In ironing it, care must be taken to hold the iron at a slight angle, to slide it fairly and evenly from end to end, and to avoid catching the corners.⁴⁶

The table was the foundation of the game. It had to be ‘solid, unshakeable and absolutely level’.⁴⁷ Expert advice for setting up a billiard table stipulated that the room should be well prepared to receive the table, and any possible sources of vibration and disturbances should be removed. Although the ground floor was the best place for the

⁴⁵ Crawley, *The Billiard Book*, pp.11-13.

⁴⁶ Crawley, *The Billiard Book*, p.12.

⁴⁷ Crawley, *The Billiard Book*, p.12.

table to ensure absolute stability, if this position was unavailable, the table was to be placed where the floor was 'level and firm'.⁴⁸ In reiterating the technical specifications for the billiard table, notions of uprightness, solidity, firmness, beauty, cleanliness, smoothness, accuracy and speed were stipulated of billiard table design and of the table's arrangement within a room.⁴⁹ It is striking that there is a resemblance between the qualities of a reputable billiard table and the Vitruvian principles of architecture, the latter similarly emphasizing beauty, commodity, uprightness, firmness and strength as idealized architectural values.⁵⁰

But what if we are interested with what happens under the table? Another important meaning of the word 'table' is 'tabula', that is, a ground, a foundation, or a surface of inscription.⁵¹ The awkward perspective produced from under the billiard table requires a conceptual recasting of 'table' as an alternative surface, 'ground' or 'foundation' for restructuring the architectural space of the Billiard Room. The billiard table is conventionally associated with certain symbolic meanings, for example, its users are masculine subjects, and are usually, economically and socially dominant. Thus, the billiard table is both a physical artifact and a conceptual idea that provides a 'ground' for these meanings to happen. However, by conceptually overturning the position of the table – by moving *under* it – we may also conceptually shift this 'ground' and transform its possible meanings.

⁴⁸ Crawley, *The Billiard Book*, p.12.

⁴⁹ See for example Gillett, *The Earlier History of Billiard Tables*, pp.5-6.

⁵⁰ Vitruvius, *The Ten Books on Architecture*, trans. Ingrid D. Rowland (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p.26 (Book One, Chapter 3).

⁵¹ *The Cassell Dictionary of Word Histories* (London: Cassell, 1999), pp.1109-10.

In a philosophical exposition of the ‘table’ as an ideological ‘ground’ for constructing particular meanings, Michel Foucault cites the fantastic juxtaposition of objects, qualities and actions brought together by Jorge Luis Borges’s Chinese encyclopaedia:

... animals are divided into: (a) belonging to the Emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) sucking pigs, (e) sirens, (f) fabulous, (g) stray dogs, (h) included in the present classification, (i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a pitcher, (l) et cetera, (m) having just broken the water pitcher, (n) that from a long way off look like flies.⁵²

It is not the actual content of the encyclopaedia that interests Foucault. He is more preoccupied with what constitutes the space of this fantastic gathering. Foucault reminds us that Borges’s encyclopaedia is worrying because it denies the conventional basis on which certain cultural knowledges and assumptions are founded, that is, Borges has removed:

... the least obvious, but most compelling, of necessities; he does away with the site, the mute ground upon which it is possible for entities to be juxtaposed. ... What has been removed, in short, is the famous ‘operating table’ in two superimposed senses: the nickel-plated, rubbery table swathed in white, glittering beneath a glass sun devouring all shadow – the table where, for an instant, perhaps forever, the umbrella encounters the sewing-machine; and also a table, a *tabula*, that enables thought to operate upon the entities of our world, to put them in order, to divide them into classes, to group them according to names that

⁵² Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), p.xv.

designate their similarities and their differences – the table upon which, since the beginning of time, language has intersected space.⁵³

Foucault argues that the relationships generated by Borges's encyclopaedia are not determined by an order of the 'Same', which is a situation marked by *a priori* ideas and language. Rather, the elements in the encyclopaedia operate through what Foucault calls the 'middle region', a mode of knowledge which is 'Other' to the two established 'orders' of knowledge shaped by cultural norms, and systematic scientific and philosophical inquiry.⁵⁴ According to Foucault, the 'middle region' is marked by confusion, obscurity, ambiguity, and the actualization of 'Other' meanings liberated from cultural norms and scientific explanations, for example, Borges's 'China' whose spaces are not comprehensible by 'any of the categories that make it possible for us to name, speak, or think'.⁵⁵

While Foucault uses the term 'middle', what he delineates is not a midpoint between two extremes or two oppositional binaries since the two 'orders' of knowledge encoded by cultural norms and scientific interpretation are understood in his argument to constitute a common dominant epistemological mode, which is characterized by a rationalized and controlled 'order' of things. Thus, I understand the 'middle region' as something 'Other' to these established modes of knowledge, and also that this 'Other' is not positioned outside of the dominant modes but as hinted in Foucault's spatial description of 'middle', is located within, amidst or in-the-middle-of dominant knowledge structures,

⁵³ Foucault, *The Order of Things*, p.xvii.

⁵⁴ Foucault, *The Order of Things*, p.xx.

⁵⁵ Foucault, *The Order of Things*, p.xix, pp.xx-xxi.

that is, the repressed ‘middle region’ is arguably foundational to how knowledge is implicitly constructed and ordered.

I bring up Foucault’s analysis of Borges’s *tabula* and his definition of the ‘middle region’ because it illuminates the problematic gap between the architectural and historical orders representing the hotel’s Billiard Room on the one hand, which I suggest are analogous to Foucault’s examples of established ‘orders’ of knowledge, and its animal anecdotes on the other hand, which are repressed by these orders yet central to this experiencing subject’s encounter. There is a resonance between, I propose, the Billiard Room’s awkward ‘under the billiard table’ perspective and Foucault’s ‘middle region’. If one agrees with Foucault that the ‘middle region’ can transform ‘the codes of language, perception, and practice’,⁵⁶ then, an architectural interpretation of the Billiard Room conducted from ‘under the table’ may reveal an alternative architectural order that deviates from, and contests its patriarchal architectural representations.

If conventional architectural order asserts a hierarchy between architecture and animal, such that the former term (‘architecture’) is dominant, while the latter (‘animal’) is repressed, the view from ‘under the table’ seeks to invert and challenge this order since it has been argued that the ‘architecture’ of the Billiard Room is inseparable, or even, founded on the ‘animal’. A view from ‘under the table’ exposes the enforced oppositional binaries in the Billiard Room, namely, architecture/animal, masculine/feminine, fact/anecdote, as unstable, and that the dominance of the first term of every pair fundamentally relies on the repression of the second term.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Foucault, *The Order of Things*, p.xxi.

⁵⁷ For discussions on the reclamation of the repressed binary term as a feminist architectural strategy, see for example, Jane Rendell, ‘Subjective Space: A Feminist Architectural History of the Burlington Arcade’, in

An examination of the intimate detail – the billiard table – suggests that the ‘animal plot’ of the Billiard Room, that is the re-ordering of architectural space and time through animal stories, involves the architectural concept of ‘overturning’, which suggests a metaphorical subversion of dominant subjects and meanings according to these animal anecdotes. Encountering the Billiard Room from ‘under the billiard table’ suggests an ‘overturning’ of the ‘ground’ from which an architectural knowledge of this architectural space may be re-constructed.

As discussed earlier, metaphor operates according to a principle of similarity between ideas or things, where one idea or thing may be linked to something else similar to it, and as Kaja Silverman argues, what is revealed through a metaphorical relationship is often another term, which is still unrealized, hidden or repressed.⁵⁸ A metaphorical ‘overturning’ of the Billiard Room brings to the fore subjects and themes that are conceptually similar to the ‘animal’. In the case of this thesis, the metaphorical associations of the animal suggest architectural subjects and themes, which relate to the grotesque and ultimately, the feminine. I argue that these repressed animal-related metaphors are, in turn, foundational to the architectural history of the Billiard Room. Using anecdotes and stories, I will argue that the architectural history and meanings of the Billiard Room are inseparable from themes and subjects that are denigrated as feminine forms of knowledge and normally excluded by conventional architectural

Duncan McCorquodale, Katerina Ruedi and Sarah Wigglesworth (eds.), *Desiring Practices: Architecture, Gender and the Interdisciplinary* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 1996), pp.217-33, especially pp.220-1.

⁵⁸ Kaja Silverman, *The Subject of Semiotics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp.110-2. See also *An Architecture of Intimate Encounter*, pp.143-7.

discourse, including the emergent architectural history of this hotel.⁵⁹ Thus, a metaphorical ‘overturning’ of the Billiard Room not only upends the hierarchy between what is dominant and what is repressed by forefronting the latter, it also deconstructs simple binary relationships by showing that the repressed feminine is not constituted external to this experiencing subject’s encounter of the Billiard Room but plays a central role in the intimate encounter.

Through the animal plot of ‘overturning’, a network of dominant as well as hitherto repressed subjects and themes – a tiger, a wild boar and a pig; a watchman and a hunter; the grotesque and the feminine – begin to scramble and complicate the architectural boundaries and meanings of the Billiard Room in this colonial hotel.

⁵⁹ On criticality of stories and anecdotes for architectural discourse, see Barbara Penner, ‘Researching Female Public Toilets: Gendered Spaces, Disciplinary Limits’, in *Journal of International Women’s Studies*, (June 2005), v.6, n.2, pp.81-98, especially p.92. See also *Empirical Contexts*, pp.106-9.

fauna

2

The Grotesque and The Billiard Room

Although a billiard room is rarely defined or understood through a visceral body as it hosts an aloof game with minimal physical contact between players, this experiencing subject's encounter with the Billiard Room at the Raffles Hotel is unusually embroiled in a trail of corporeal evidence. Through the animal stories, I come across tears in clothing and hiding holes in the building fabric, mouths that gape and squeal, and corpulent bodies. These bodies are poignantly excessive rather than anthropomorphic. They are blemished, fat, clumsy, emaciated, slippery, coloured, oily, hairy, naked or striped.

Outwardly, a massacre of a tiger in a colonial hotel may be interpreted as a boast of masculine bravado. However, the Billiard Room's unlikely bunch of animals – three of which will be examined in this discussion and include the tiger, the pig and the wild boar – and their maladroit adversaries – an expatriate head teacher and a rotund Sikh hotel watchman – radically transform these normative expectations. A closer reading of the animal stories reveal that there is no heroic figure and no triumphant kill. In its place is a comic, unruly and carnivalesque atmosphere, marked by a confusion of boundaries, a disarray of bodies and a reversal of roles. Thus, instead of the colonial architectural narratives, which form the emergent architectural history of this hotel, what other architectural contexts and meanings can this experiencing subject draw on to make sense of her encounter with the Billiard Room's fleshy bodies?

Developing a critical perspective from ‘under-the-billiard-table’, this final chapter conducts an alternative excursion into the Billiard Room through the ungainly bodies insinuated by its animal anecdotes. A close reading will be made through the concepts of the grotesque and the carnivalesque, to reveal how the enforced hierarchies of this masculine domain are undermined by the animals and their adversaries, whom I propose, fracture the idealized image of the masculine hunt. I also argue that the Billiard Room encountered through its animal stories is founded on a repressed wild feminine, which violently erupts through the grotesque bodies in the Billiard Room.

Grotesque Animals: Approaching the Billiard Room from Below

On the morning of 12 August 1902, the head teacher of Raffles Institution, a premier boys’ school just down the road from the hotel, was rudely shaken from his sleep. The amateur hunter was called to the scene of the Billiard Room at the Raffles Hotel.¹ When one of the hotel’s bar Chinese ‘boys’ was opening up the space earlier that morning, he had glimpsed a loose tiger lurking just outside the railings of the raised structure. Apparently both tiger and ‘boy’ locked eyes for a brief moment before fleeing in opposite directions. By the time C. M. Phillips arrived, the tiger was already cowering under the floorboards of the Billiard Room. Nonetheless, even while the tiger was cornered in the dingy space underneath the Billiard Room, the colonial hunter appeared disoriented,

¹ ‘A Tiger in Town: Shot At Raffles Hotel Under the Billiard Room’, in *The Straits Times*, 13 August 1902. Unless otherwise mentioned, citations of the tiger episode are extracted from this newspaper article.

nonplussed and disadvantaged from the onset. ‘Jerked’ from his sleep and barely having time to dress, he made his now-historical debut in pyjamas.

Philips reportedly made several embarrassing wide misses, firing wildly into the Billiard Room’s undercroft space and hitting its brickwork pillars repeatedly before finally striking the tiger. Still, the beast did not surrender to the bullet willingly as it was ‘seen lying at length on the ground, but not dead; for he raised his head’. The half-dying tiger had to be put out of its misery with another bullet fired between its eyes. It then took ‘a good deal of persuasion to get several onlookers to crawl beneath the floor and drag out the body; but at length one, bolder than the rest, got hold of the dead tiger’s hind legs’ and dragged him out to daylight. The mess was considerable. ‘A big portion of the tiger’s head was blown away’. Phillips was disconsolate with his torn coat. And abandoning their muted civility, the hotel crowd gaped over the hind legs of the ill-fated circus escapée.

While the tiger was sympathetically cast in this newspaper report, Phillips received a more ambivalent treatment. Although he was the hunter who ‘saved’ the hotel from a man-eating beast, the head teacher also seemed like an unwilling target tossed out of bed in his pyjamas. He appeared clumsier and more pathetic than the innocent circus runaway he had just slain. Significantly, being the backcloth of this sensational hunt, the Billiard Room is first introduced to the experiencing subject not from an upright perspective. In this case, the architectural knowledge of the masculine Billiard Room is unflatteringly mapped from its dark underbelly and mediated through a runaway circus tiger, gaping crowds, wide misses, and the reluctance of a trigger-happy huntsman in pyjamas. Also, whether intentionally or not, the newspaper report appeared to highlight

associative similarities between the tiger and Philips, for example, it pointed out the pyjamas worn by the head teacher and the tiger's striped body, and it mentioned that the tiger found itself wounded while Philips 'spoilt his coat'. In this eyewitness newspaper account, it seems that the hunter was inseparable from the animal, which maintained an upper hand even when it was 'dead as a nail'. Hence, although the tiger hunt took place in a masculine space, the juxtaposition of the Billiard Room against a sheepish, half naked amateur hunter with his fluke wild trophy, was by no means conventional.

By reiterating the tiger anecdote in some detail, I wish to draw attention to the critical implications of yoking these animal stories to the architectural imagery of the Billiard Room. The kind of bodily image normatively linked to the discursive location of the Billiard Room is no doubt a paternal, patriarchal and valiant colonial figure. Thus, the hotel has unsurprisingly been at pains to inscribe even distant connections to stalwart colonial personalities. The cast of personalities includes Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936) whose novels *The Jungle Book* (1894) and *Just So Stories* (1902)² revolved around animals and forged a coincidental link with the hotel's animal association. Cartoonist George Nonis hinted at this coincidence when he paired a recent cartoon strip of the tiger story with the oft-quoted line borrowed from Kipling and used by the hotel to promote the standard of its cuisine which stated, 'When in Singapore, feed at the Raffles'.³ (Fig.3.2.1)

Nevertheless, with the animals trooping in, the Billiard Room's architectural narratives are no longer defined by or associated exclusively with an upright colonial body. It is entered from the 'lower' edges – from under the floorboards, between an animal's hind

² Rudyard Kipling, *The Jungle Book* (London: Macmillan, 1894); Rudyard Kipling, *Just So Stories* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

³ George Nonis, *Raffles: The Untold Story* (Singapore: Angsana Books, 2001), p.64.

legs, framed by a pair of pyjamas and a torn coat, and a cowering group of mostly bachelor hotel boarders, who reputedly lacked the courage to pull out the dead tiger's body from under the building after it was shot.



3.2.1 'When in Singapore, feed at the Raffles'.

In using the term 'body', I refer to a discourse that considers the transformative and often transgressive effects of the somatic, the fleshy and the sensual. Here, the somatic is overlaid on a discursive location – the Billiard Room at the Raffles Hotel, a heterosexual, masculine, colonial stomping ground – whose emergent architectural history, I have argued, follows a colonial patriarchal model. This model not only excludes the 'animal' as part of its architectural discourse, but also, I will show, excludes metaphorical categories associated with the animal, which include subjects perceived as wild, disgusting, dirty, beyond 'the norm', primitive, infantile or feminine.

The concept of the 'grotesque body' is key to this discussion. This concept was first introduced in the fifteenth century by Francois Rabelais, who controversially celebrated the unruly subjects of festive carnival scenes in his writing. The critical use of the grotesque body was firmly established in literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin's contemporary interpretation of Rabelais' transversal of 'high' and 'low' cultures, practices and languages. According to literary theorists Peter Stallybrass and Allon White:

Bakhtin's use of the carnival centres the concept upon its 'doubleness ...the official and unofficial are locked together'. ... Symbolic polarities of high and low, official and popular, grotesque and classical are mutually constructed and deformed in carnival.⁴

For this discussion, I draw specifically from Stallybrass and White's reworking of Rabelais and Bakhtin's concept of the grotesque body as an epistemological category. Stallybrass and White differentiate their politically transgressive concept of the carnivalesque as distinct from the celebratory and utopian mode of symbolic inversion suggested by Terry Eagleton and Roberto de Matta. They criticize the utopian perspective as nostalgic and uncritically populist as it does not address the concerns of weaker subjects, for example, women, and ethnic and religious minorities who do not 'belong' and continue to be demonized and abused by 'displaced abjection' through

⁴ R. Wilson, 'Carnival and Play', in *Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin: His Circle, His Influence*, Papers presented at the International Colloquium (Queen's University Kingston, Ontario, 7-9 October, 1983), p.320, cited by Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), p.16.

carnavalesque practices. Stallybrass and White also caution that the political economy of the utopian model is limited as it is usually complicit with official cultures.⁵

Rather than accepting the carnivalesque as a category restricted to ephemeral festive events involving 'ritual spectacles such as fairs, popular feasts and wakes, processions and competitions, comic shows, mummary and dancing, open-air amusement with costumes and masks, giants, dwarfs, monsters, trained animals',⁶ Stallybrass and White frame the carnivalesque as a 'broader concept of symbolic transgression and inversion'.⁷ Through this expanded concept, the carnivalesque is attributed as a space, which instigates the formation of the grotesque body, and encompasses 'one instance of a generalized economy of transgression and the recoding of high or low relations across the whole social structure', where the grotesque body takes its place as 'a governing dynamic of the body, the household, the city, the nation-state – indeed a vast range of interconnected domains'.⁸ Although some of the animal anecdotes by nature of their content, humour and sense of spectacle may appear to adhere to a limited definition of the carnivalesque, that is as Stallybrass and White notes, tends to be seen as celebratory, this architectural interpretation of the Billiard Room explores Stallybrass and White's expanded concept of the carnivalesque and the production of grotesque bodies to understand how 'high and low relations' are re-coded in this architectural space.

Key to my interpretation of these animal stories is the differentiation between the 'classical body' and the 'grotesque body'. As Stallybrass and White point out, these two

⁵ Stallybrass and White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, p.19.

⁶ Stallybrass and White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, p.8.

⁷ Stallybrass and White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, p.18.

⁸ Stallybrass and White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, p.19.

terms were used by Bakhtin to denote two polar opposites constituting ‘high’ and ‘low’ symbolism. The ‘classical body’ refers to ‘the inherent *form* of the high official culture and suggests that the shape and plasticity of the human body is indissociable from the shape and plasticity of the discursive material and social norm’.⁹ Significantly, the classical body is compared with the elevated, upright and static classical statue mounted on a plinth:

The classical statue is the radiant centre of a transcendent individualism, ‘put on a pedestal’, raised above the viewer and the commonality and anticipating passive admiration from below. We gaze up to the figure and wonder. We are placed as spectators to an instant – frozen yet apparently universal – of epic or tragic time. The presence of the statue ... retroflects us to the heroic past, it is a *memento classici* for which we are the eternal latecomers, and for whom meditative imitation is the appropriate contrition. The classical statue has no openings or orifices ...¹⁰

Stallybrass and White remind us that the original conception of the classical body was more than an aesthetic standard. It was structured according to the ideologies of ‘high’ discourses – ‘philosophy, statecraft, theology, law, ... and literature’ and encoded ‘regulating systems which were closed, homogenous, monumental, centred and symmetrical’.¹¹

⁹ Stallybrass and White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, p.21.

¹⁰ Stallybrass and White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, pp.21-2.

¹¹ Stallybrass and White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, p.22.

Notably, the Vitruvian categories familiar to architecture – *regola*, *ordine*, *misura*, *disegno* and *maniera*, which translate as ‘rules’, ‘order’, ‘measure’, ‘design’ and ‘style’ – are cited by Stallybrass and White as fitting examples of the classical body’s governing principles.¹² These ‘proper’ Vitruvian categories are at odds with Bakhtin’s ‘material bodily principle’, which emphasizes the fleshy and the excessive.¹³ Here, it is important to distinguish between Vitruvius’s concept of the anthropomorphic body, later popularized by architects like Le Corbusier through his *Modulor*¹⁴ on the one hand, and Bakhtin’s bodily material, or the grotesque body, on the other hand. The first is concerned with a frozen and perfected form describable through conventional categories of knowledge.¹⁵ The second relates to what is both excluded yet central to the idealized first body.¹⁶ This second body confounds simple binary opposition. I have emphasized that the concept of ‘overturning’ is concerned with revealing what is architecturally repressed. This architectural concept does not reinforce simple binaries by substituting the dominant term with the repressed term. Rather it aims to show how the dominant term is reliant on the suppression of the weaker term. Relevant here is Stallybrass and White’s definition of the hybrid as a repressed term, which undermines simple opposition by being outside of, yet central to, the dominant representational system:

¹² Stallybrass and White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, p.22.

¹³ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. H. Iswolsky (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1968), p.19, cited by Stallybrass and White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, p.10.

¹⁴ Le Corbusier, *The Modulor: A Harmonious Measure to the Human Scale Universally Applicable to Architecture and Mechanics* (London: Faber, 1954).

¹⁵ Stallybrass and White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, p.22. For a feminist critique of the androcentric body as a universal subject, see Diana Agrest, ‘Architecture from Without: Body, Logic and Sex’, in Jane Rendell, Barbara Penner and Iain Borden (eds.), *Gender Space Architecture: An Interdisciplinary Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp.358-70.

¹⁶ Stallybrass and White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, p.58.

Hybridization, a second and more complex form of the grotesque than the simply excluded “outside” or “low” to a given grid, produces new combinations and strange instabilities in a given semiotic system. It therefore generates the possibility of shifting *the very terms of the system itself*, by erasing and interrogating the relationships that constitute it.¹⁷

The body-image of the classical statue is remarkably resonant with the body-image of an idealized architectural monument. It also echoes the upright, functional and classical architectural body enforced, for example, by architect Adolf Loos. In a convoluted argument published in his infamous article ‘Ornament and Crime’ (1908), Loos traces ornament to crime, and further back to the mind of ‘the amoral child’ who, he argues, ultimately evolves from an embryo with characteristics akin to those of the ‘animal kingdom’ and the native.¹⁸ For Loos, the monument is distinctly expressed as a (neo)classical body, free from accursed ornamentation (a taboo practice linked to the infantile, the native and the animal), and with a strong relation to tradition and authority. If one places this expanded definition of the classical body into the context of the Billiard Room at the hotel, ‘the classical body’ may refer to, at least, three entities – the proper colonial subject for example, C. M. Phillips or Rudyard Kipling; the Billiard Room as a space encoded with ideologies and desires fundamental to the image of the masculine subject, and the colonial monument itself.

¹⁷ Stallybrass and White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, p.58.

¹⁸ Adolf Loos, ‘Ornament and Crime’, in Ulrich Conrads (ed.), *Programs and Manifestoes on Twentieth Century Architecture* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1970), pp.19-24. See also Hal Foster, *Prosthetic Gods* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2004), pp.55-107. Foster analyzes Loos’s manifesto as a search for the ‘proper subject’ – the aesthetic conditions of such a subject was, for Loos, necessarily linked to (neo)classical architecture. Although Foster does not use the term ‘classical body’, his definition of the ‘proper subject’ is similar, ‘I hope “proper” will resonate here in its various registers – correct, clean, possessive, reflexive...’. See Foster, *Prosthetic Gods*, p.58.

In contrast to the classical form, the grotesque body is fragmented, horizontal, teeming, mobile, multiple, bulging, excessive and full of holes. Bakhtin emphasizes that it is a body ‘in the act of becoming. It is never finished, never completed; it is continually built, created, and builds and creates another body’.¹⁹ Thus, the boundaries created around the grotesque body are dynamic, permeable and open to exchange. According to Stallybrass and White, the grotesque body is marked by:

... impurity (both in the sense of dirt and mixed categories), heterogeneity, masking, protuberant distension, disproportion, exorbitancy, clamour, decentred or eccentric arrangements, a focus on gaps, orifices or symbolic filth (what Mary Douglas calls ‘matter out of place’), physical needs and pleasures of the ‘lower bodily stratum’, materiality and parody.²⁰

It is paraded as a ‘body of parts’, and one’s knowledge of this kind of body is antithetical to ‘the body as a functional tool and the body as still life’.²¹

In other words, the grotesque body is antithetical to Loos’s conception of the proper architectural body exemplified by the monument. The grotesque body operates by inversion – inside out and upside down. The tiger account actively produces a ‘new’ architectural body of the Billiard Room from bottom up if we consider the following positions. The hunter was forced on all fours. He could not see through the dark

¹⁹ Mikhail Bakhtin, ‘Carnival Ambivalence: Laughter, Praise, Abuse’, in Pam Morris (ed.), *The Bakhtin Reader: Selected Writings of Bakhtin, Medvedev, Voloshinov* (London: Oxford University Press, 1994), p.233.

²⁰ Stallybrass and White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, p.23.

²¹ Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), p.105.

interiors of the undercroft. In doing so, he enacted a posture that disrupted the supremacy of a vertical order, and simultaneously robbed of the accuracy and rationality given by light and by vision, was forced to surrender to gut instinct. Notably, in this ‘overturned’ condition, Philips shot wildly and inaccurately. Consequently, the space drawn out for this experiencing subject is not one commanded from an authoritative one-point perspective. Instead, it is fragmented, animalistic, out-of-control and lowly – a simulation of a quadruped’s view of the world.

The ‘grotesque’ outline of the Billiard Room is even more pronounced in two subsequent animal stories, both involving the porcine species – a razor backed wild hog and a domestic pig. These animals made riotous entries into the hotel in 1903 and 1904 respectively, and they were chased into the vicinity of the Billiard Room.²² Pitted against the porky beasts was a larger-than-life Sikh *jagah*, which means ‘watchman’ in Malay. In addition, the aggrandized idea of the ‘hunt’ – a term used hyperbolically in these porcine accounts – was the butt of a joke here. For example, the qualities of self-importance, masculine bravery and mental ingenuity which differentiated man from beast were displaced by the grotesque traits of monstrous size, lack of restraint, and a confused blurring of bodily boundaries, gait and emotions between animal and human. Both accounts hinted at the resemblance between the obese porcine pair and the gross physical appearance of the ‘monumental’ *jagah* – who outweighed everyone at eighteen stone and towered over the diminutive local population at ‘over six feet in his stockings’.

²² ‘Boar Hunt at Raffles: Another Wild *Shikar* on the Hotel Verandah,’ in *The Straits Times*, 27 February 1903; ‘Great Hunt at Raffles: Terrible Struggle Between the Fat *Jagah* and a Fatter Pig,’ in *The Straits Times*, 6 September 1904. Unless otherwise stated, all citations to these two incidents indicated in this discussion are extracted from these reports.

The prize proportions of the three protagonists were hilariously augmented by the energetic cacophony of bestial sounds and movements. The pig's 'accursedly unsuitable squeak' and the hog's 'scouring with pain and rage' were robustly matched by the *jagah's* 'war whoops' and his great roar. As the pig 'ran berserk among the flower beds', the watchman reciprocated by charging madly at the obese porker, 'casting his dignity and all else save duty, to the winds'. When the pig made a beeline for the undercroft space of the Billiard Room, the *jagah* apparently summoned 'the wrestling instincts of his race', and ended up rolling 'in the dust in a death struggle with the pig'.

Thus, at the underfoot of the exclusive Billiard Room, a grotesque spectacle ensued, furnished no less by unsightly protuberant bodies entangling man with beast, dirt, sweat, squeaks, laughter and applause, where 'pig and man rolled higgledy-piggledly and squealing like fury, while the residents of Raffles Hotel applauded, now pig, now man'. In the case of the hog, which also ran for cover into the interior of the Billiard Room after a short wrestling bout with the *jagah*, the latter reportedly pursued his obese nemesis with a lance, fashioned from an uprooted orchid stake, which was used to strike the hog with 'a couple of lusty blows'. Then, as the hog cautiously emerged from the Billiard Room, it was pursued down Bras Basah Road by a 'hog-hungry mob' – a pattern reminiscent of the gaping 'tiger-struck' crowd and the applauding onlookers of the pig-man rumpus – led by the fat watchman and his manager, Mr C. Chaytor.

Of particular relevance to my reading are two details – the representation of the Sikh watchman in place of the idealized colonial hunter and the heightened comic-corporeal spectacle shaped by exaggerated and excessive elements. Poignantly, the *jagah's* animal adventures mirrored the head teacher's in many ways, for example, as Phillips's pyjamas

and half torn coat were recurrent motifs in the tiger episode, the watchman's elaborate costume, which was much more resplendent being a cross between an evening suit, 'an immense *puggree*' a Sikh wrapround head gear and 'a sash and new lemon-coloured boots', was also key. While Phillips barely touched the tiger, the watchman's body was deeply entangled in wrestling bouts with both pig and hog. The architecture of the Billiard Room perceived through the over-indulged watchman warrants further consideration. Appearing in two of the four animal stories, it is the watchman who is more closely identifiable with the Billiard Room than Phillips.

My interpretation of this figure is one of ambivalence. Although the *jagah* was described in much fuller physiognomic detail than the head teacher, he was not given an individual name but caricatured according to his function (*'jagah'*), his place of birth ('hails from somewhere near Peshawar') and his race ('Sikh'). The *jagah* was also not treated as a full-blown hero. His comic underdog image was closely linked to his generous bodily proportions and this protuberant, fatty body became instrumental for his successful defense of the hotel. Fighting the porkers tooth to claw, he was described as behaving like an animal by running berserk, rolling and wrestling with his animal opponents.

However, an interpretation of these accounts should be attentive to the fact that these reports were ideological documents of their time and hence, immersed within a colonial rhetoric in which controversial racial and gendered stereotypes were played out.²³ The stereotyping of the 'native' was a common colonial writing technique, which was used to

²³ For discussions on gender and colonial discourse, see for example Sara Mills, *Discourses of Difference: An Analysis of Women's Travel Writing and Colonialism* (London: Routledge, 1991), pp.47-63.

construct a limited and idealized notion of exoticism.²⁴ In this vein, the *jagah* was a figure associated with the preconceived notion of non-Western primitivism and exoticism. As historian David Arnold notes:

Perceptions of 'primitiveness' in nature inevitably extended to the human inhabitants of the tropics as well. ... as the American geographer Ellen Churchill Semple put it ... 'Where man has remained in the tropics, with few exceptions, he has suffered arrested development His nursery has kept him a child'. Alternatively, in the other belittling stereotype of the colonial age, tropical men resembled women, whether from their unfamiliar appearance or because tropical heat, humidity and disease had sapped their virility.²⁵

The *jagah* was portrayed in close relation to his animal adversaries, as the following statements in the newspapers of the day attested: 'Terrible struggle between the fat *jagah* and a fatter pig', 'the *Jagah* outweighed and out maneuvered the porker' and 'the pig was not built like a Sikh'. He was defined and defiled by his panting, a bodily trait which was shared by the hog. His profusion of sweat and war whoops made him comparable, albeit unfavourably, to the slippery and squealing pig. Rather than manly, the *jagah's* grotesque physiognomy, habits, movements and mental state were rendered as infantile. Here, the associations between the animal, the infant and the primitivism of the native as highlighted by Loos were, I suggest, implicitly rehearsed.

²⁴ For discussions on discursive texts and colonial ideology, see for example Mills, *Discourses of Difference*, pp.1-19; S. Shankar, *Textual Traffic* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2001), pp.13-25.

²⁵ Ellen Churchill Semple, *Influences of Geographic Environment on the Basis of Ratzel's System of Anthro-Geography* (London: Constable, 1911), p.635, cited by David Arnold, 'Illusory Riches: Representations of the Tropical World, 1840-1950', in *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography*, (2000), v.21, n.1, pp.6-18; here p.11.

Furthermore, although his involvement with the porcine species may have been coincidental, the *jagah*'s double act with the hog and the pig also bear critical reconsideration. Compared to Phillips who was pitted against a majestic man-eating tiger, the *jagah*'s wrestling companions were rated amongst the most lowly in the animal kingdom. Pig-loathing is a perception was not only dominant in Europe,²⁶ but also in many parts of Southeast Asia, where pork is defiled meat for the devout Muslim, and although popularly consumed as a meat staple by the Chinese, the sow, notably a female pig, is regarded as a lazy, slovenly, greedy, unfaithful and slow-witted creature.²⁷ The pig is a domesticated beast marked by rural ignorance. Pigs were demonized in Christian liturgy – the prodigal son was redeemed from the misery of the pig-sty and it was into the body of the swine that Christ banished the devil.²⁸ According to Stallybrass and White, 'the "unclean" spirits are literally displaced from man to pig which, in its turn, becomes the demonized extraterritorial, literally driven off ... to become the pure outside'.²⁹ The pig is also inherently gendered. Stallybrass and White, in their analysis of ambivalent socio-cultural semiotics associated with pigs, suggest that early records of Greek and Latin slang linked the words 'porcus' or 'porcellus' to the female genitalia, prostitutes were called 'pig merchants' and "'porcus" was above all a nursery word used by women, especially nurses, of the pudenda of little girls"'.³⁰

²⁶ See Stallybrass and White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, pp.44-66.

²⁷ For example, in the Chinese zodiac comprising of twelve animals, the sow is last animal in the series, is gendered feminine, and the only animal with a derogatory description. For discussion on attitudes of Muslims towards pigs, see Marvin Harris, *Cows, Pigs, Wars and Witches: The Riddles of Culture* (Glasgow: Fontana Books, 1977), pp.31-8.

²⁸ Stallybrass and White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, p.50.

²⁹ Stallybrass and White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, p.50.

³⁰ J. Henderson, *The Maculate Muse: Obscene Language in Attic Comedy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975), p.72, cited by Stallybrass and White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, pp.44-5.

In my reading, the *jagah* is a hybrid grotesque body. The *jagah* was both lauded and laughed at. He was praised for his ability to wrestle the pig and the boar but equally feminized for his emotional incontinence. Indeed, as Stallybrass and White remind us, the hybrid figure is much more complex and subversive than the simply 'low', enabling it to shift structures of meaning 'by erasing and interrogating the relationships that constitute it'.³¹ In these accounts, he was the fleshy protagonist who was located *both* inside *and* outside the colonial grid. Although the *jagah* was ridiculed for his racial characteristics and bodily attributes, he was also a central part of the colonial establishment being its public 'body', that is, literally the first body who greeted the incoming visitor at the front door. Thus, this ridicule while aimed at the *jagah's* body, also overturned the hierarchy of colonial body he represented. In this instance, the most powerful overturning tactic comes from the laughter evoked by the *jagah's* comic vulgarity.

Vulgar carnivalesque laughter, as Bakhtin reminds us, may be perceived as more complex than the result of straightforward ridicule. Carnivalesque laughter is 'ambivalent: it is gay, triumphant, and at the same time mocking, deriding. It asserts and denies, it buries and revives'.³² How laughter operates depends on where the *jagah* is located. We may laugh at the *jagah* as the infantile figure who stood in opposition to the colonial hunter or we may laugh at the *jagah* who represented the self-aggrandizing hotel. This scene of laughter enables the displacement of social and spatial hierarchies within the symbolic domain of the Billiard Room. Indeed, carnivalesque laughter becomes important as an alternative mode of expression for groups with limited access to symbolic

³¹ Stallybrass and White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, p.58.

³² Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, p.12, cited by Stallybrass and White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, p.8.

forms of communication, for example, women, children and itinerant groups like those of the circus, migrants or immigrants.³³

Laughter, according to philosopher Georges Bataille, is one of the fundamental characteristics of the 'formless' or '*informe*',³⁴ that is, the condition of an entity still undefined by a known idea, language or representation, in other words, a 'becoming' that is still unknowable, unpredictable and uncontrollable. In a Platonic dialogue, Parmenides presents a series of questions to Socrates in order to clarify what things 'have an idea of form'.³⁵ In response to Parmenides's questions as to whether 'hair and mud and dirt' are assigned forms and ideas of their own, Socrates is unable to answer in the affirmative. This is because these entities are too ridiculous, worthless and trivial to develop into convincing 'forms' or legitimate 'ideas'. Their indescribable condition necessitates one's engagement with these objects to be made through the body, that is, through physical contact, through the mouth and laughter.³⁶

Laughter is part of the vocabulary of expression when one encounters 'something one has no idea of'.³⁷ It constitutes the vocal depths of the grotesque body from which are issued 'words that are not proper, not very elevated, not polite, gross and dirty words', a

³³ For another feminist architectural argument exploring laughter as a form of feminine *metis*, that is, a creative and subversive force, see Ann Bergren, 'Female Fetish Urban Form', in Diana Agrest, Patricia Conway and Leslie Kanes Weisman (eds.), *The Sex of Architecture* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1996), pp.77-96; see especially p.91 on the story of Baubo and Demeter.

³⁴ For Bataille's idea on the *informe*, see Yve-Alain Bois and Rosalind E. Krauss, *Formless: A User's Guide* (New York: Zone Books, 1997), pp.235-54; Denis Hollier, *Against Architecture: The Writings of Georges Bataille*, trans. Betsy Wing (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1993), pp.98-114.

³⁵ Hollier, *Against Architecture*, p.99.

³⁶ Hollier, *Against Architecture*, p.99.

³⁷ Hollier, *Against Architecture*, p.98.

‘low blow’.³⁸ Plato associates laughter with visceral touch and bodily pleasure, and in turn, decries laughter as a gesture which marks the becoming of something essentially ridiculous, unspeakable, repulsive and grotesque:

But – as you know, pleasures – and I think this is particularly true of the greatest pleasures – involve the person experiencing them in a ridiculous, if not utterly repulsive display. This makes us self-conscious, and we keep these pleasures as secret as possible, reserving all such activities for the hours of darkness, as if they should not be exposed to the light of day.³⁹

Plato ascribes ‘pleasure’ as that to which all animals strive towards.⁴⁰

Architecture, like philosophy, has also little to do with laughter.⁴¹ Although one may laugh heartily at the antics of the *jagah* and his animal wards – we may even say that it is primarily through this carnivalesque laughter that one encounters the Billiard Room – there is virtually no discursive means for critically engaging with this encounter architecturally. Architectural discourse simply does not provide us with the ‘ideas’ and ‘forms’ to deal with the ‘pleasure’ we gain from these animal stories. Our laughter is necessarily limited to the dimly lit spaces of the hotel’s museum where these stories are

³⁸ Hollier, *Against Architecture*, p.98.

³⁹ Plato, *Philebus*, trans. Robin A. H. Waterfield (New York: Penguin Books, 1982), p.147, (66a), cited by Hollier, *Against Architecture*, p.100.

⁴⁰ Hollier, *Against Architecture*, p.100.

⁴¹ For exceptions, see for example Charles Jencks’s commentary on Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown’s ironic use of traditional and modern architectural elements to celebrate the complexities of popular ‘taste-cultures’. See Charles Jencks, *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture* (London: Academy Editions, 1984), pp.154-5; Charles Jencks, *The New Paradigm in Architecture: The Language of Post Modernism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), pp.55-62.

kept apart and exist only as trivia because they cannot infect the rational language of architectural narratives and drawings. Nevertheless, in laughing, this experiencing subject begins to thwart the limits of architecture's authoritative language. She starts to overturn the hierarchy of colonial architectural discourse by allowing the *jagah*'s antics to reinvigorate the Billiard Room. Already we find the orthographic drawings and the hotel's emergent architectural history, which focus solely on the Billiard Room's pure architectural forms, inadequate to fully account for this architecture.

Further, architectural discourse not only denies the animal and the grotesque body, it also abhors ambivalence. In the Billiard Room, I argue that the denigration of the low was instrumental in guaranteeing the officious and the high, such that not one but both sides were necessary for the construction of the Billiard Room's architectural meaning and ideology. In the next section, I examine the historical impetus and strategies underlying the negation of the grotesque body. Such impetus is traced through the pathologization of particular kinds of spaces, which emanated from two very different medical disciplines in the late nineteenth century. These disciplines notably drew very similar conclusions, which I will show, ultimately determined the ideological values of later modernist architectural discourse.

Pathological Spaces: Fauna, Disease and Negation

According to Bakhtin, the grotesque bodily topography is mainly shaped by convexities and orifices, that is, a body capable of transgressing its given (or sanctioned) limits by

protruding, bulging, sprouting and branching off.⁴² In its original conception, this kind of body was inherently linked to the feminine, to ‘fecundation, pregnancy, childbirth’.⁴³ In the nineteenth century, this grotesque body was also incriminated as a pathological body – amongst others, that of the degenerate, the hysteric, the prostitute, the ‘savage’ and the native – and it was associated with specific spaces, which held ambivalent meanings of *both* desire and disgust in the collective mentality. Examples of such spaces include the jungle, the prison, the fair, the circus, the theatre, the Orient, the asylum, the street and the increasingly sequestered and privatized domestic interior.⁴⁴

Notably, psychoanalysis, a bourgeois discourse that developed rapidly at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, linked hysteria to ‘grotesque figures’ manifested particularly in two categories – animals and the carnivalesque body which was ‘animalized’ by dirt, gluttony, intoxicating drink, sexual promiscuity and vulgar speech. The fearsome body of the ‘savage’ was a cross between the two categories. For example, the American Indian dressed like an animal was cited by psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud in his case notes on the phobia of a patient, Frau Emmy von M.⁴⁵ Bataille described how an image of a tortured and disfigured Chinese man given to him by his psychoanalyst in 1928 and which Bataille kept on his desk, inspired the philosopher’s darkest erotic thoughts and allowed him to journey into a near mystical experience, ‘This snapshot

⁴² Bakhtin, ‘Carnival Ambivalence’, p.235.

⁴³ Bakhtin, ‘Carnival Ambivalence’, p.235.

⁴⁴ See Stallybrass and White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, pp.171-90. Stallybrass and White also examine eighteenth and nineteenth-centuries domestic space ‘below stairs’ occupied by the maid (pp.149-70). Jane Rendell argues that the eighteenth-century prostitute was compared to a disorderly space and metaphorically encoded as a gaping ‘hole’ in the public realm of the street, see Jane Rendell, *The Pursuit of Pleasure: Gender, Space and Architecture in Regency London* (London: Athlone, 2002), pp135-7. For a discussion on the family home and its repressions, see Lilian Chee, *The Purloined Museum: Finding the Freud Museum* (Masters Dissertation, Bartlett School of Architecture, London, 2001).

⁴⁵ Stallybrass and White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, p.171

played a decisive role in my life. I have never stopped being obsessed by this image of pain, simultaneously ecstatic and intolerable'.⁴⁶ Recall also that two of Freud's patients were infamously named after animals:

'Rat Man' and 'Wolf Man' ... find their metaphorical proper names not in an unmotivated raid upon the taxonomy of rodents and mammals, but in the terrors conjured by the semantic material from cultural domains (the slum, the forest) extraterritorial to their own constructed identities as socio-historical subjects.⁴⁷

Freud further linked the hysterical attack to the distorted pantomime body of one performing in the fair or the circus. He suggested that these attacks were 'phantasies projected and translated into motor activity and represented in pantomime.'⁴⁸ Often the hysteric was self-conscious of her body, especially the lower bodily stratum for which she had no other means of symbolic articulation except for disgust. Thus, the hysteric loathed and was horrified by her own grotesque body supposedly contaminated by dirt and fat.⁴⁹ Consequently, respectable women who were diagnosed with hysteria were encouraged to expunge this unspeakable disgust by literally talking it out. As much as psychoanalysis inscribed the grotesque body in the animal and in the unruly carnivalesque body, it also extended this inscription metaphorically to the feminized

⁴⁶ Georges Bataille, *Oeuvres Complètes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971-88), v.10, p.627, cited by Hollier, *Against Architecture*, p.84.

⁴⁷ Stallybrass and White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, p.196.

⁴⁸ Sigmund Freud, 'General Remarks on Hysterical Attacks,' in *Dora: An Analysis of a Case of Hysteria*, trans. D. Bryan (New York: Macmillan, 1963), p.153, cited by Stallybrass and White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, p.174.

⁴⁹ See especially example of Marie Cardinal of her biographical account of the struggle to accept her own body. Marie Cardinal, *The Words to Say It*, trans. P. Goodhart (London: Picador Books, 1984), cited by Stallybrass and White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, pp.184-90.

body of the hysteric. Hence, this metaphor brought together the animal, the carnivalesque and the corrupted feminine physique as grotesque.

At the same time, pathologizations of the animalistic body and its attendant spaces were developed in parallel within an altogether different type of medical discourse. Tropical medicine started off as a colonial, scientific discipline that emerged almost contemporaneously with bourgeois psychoanalytic practice in the late nineteenth century. Despite its strong alliance with empirical science, tropical medicine was developed as a rhetorical stance that promoted moral hygiene and decried a disgust for the unknown 'Other'. According to cultural geographer David N. Livingstone, the 'Other' was generalized in the nineteenth century as having animal, effeminate or infantile qualities and there was a view that 'masculine' races were 'born of harsher climates'.⁵⁰ The notion of the healthy, white, male, heterosexual body, or in other words, the classical body, was central to this rhetoric. These physical features were implicitly paired with moral certitude and sexual restraint. Although tropical medicine did not come into being as a formal discourse until the end of the nineteenth century – an event marked by the publication of Patrick Manson's (1844-1922) canonical text titled *Tropical Diseases* in 1898,⁵¹ and the opening of the London School of Tropical Medicine in the Seamen's Hospital Society's Branch Hospital at Albert Docks at Greenwich in October 1899⁵² – the idea of a grotesque and diseased physique ravaged by tropical

⁵⁰ See David N. Livingstone, 'Tropical Climate and Moral Hygiene: The Anatomy of a Victorian Debate', in *British Journal for the History of Science* (1999), v.32, pp.93-110; here pp.105-6; Arnold, 'Illusory Riches: Representations of the Tropical World', pp.10-13.

⁵¹ Patrick Manson, *Tropical Medicine: A Manual of Diseases of Warm Climates* (London: Cassel, 1898).

⁵² For the history of the London School of Tropical Medicine (now called The London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine) see Lise Wilkinson and Anne Hardy, *Prevention and Cure: The London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine* (London: Paul Kegan, 2001), pp.1-29; Sir Philip Manson-Bahr, *History of the School of Tropical Medicine in London 1899-1949* (London: H. K. Lewis and Co. Ltd., 1956), pp.28-56.

pathogens and other moral ‘contaminants’ was pre-empted by early-nineteenth-century treatises like James Johnson’s *The Influence of Tropical Climates on the European Constitution*,⁵³ a text, which warned of the risk of contracting an animalistic and savage anatomy, which was allegedly plentiful in the torrid zones.

Livingstone observes that standard medical treatments of tropical diseases historically focused on curbing bodily excesses. The authors of these treatments emphasized ‘prophylactic advice on exercise, bathing, alcohol consumption and the conduct of the “passions”’.⁵⁴ Not only was tropical medicine instituted as a formal scientific discipline, it also formed a crucial mechanism in imperial politics.⁵⁵ Three months after Manson took on the post of medical adviser to the Colonial Office in 1897, the first lecture he gave to medical students titled ‘On the Necessity for Special Education in Tropical Medicine’ was conveniently absorbed into a Colonial Office memorandum.⁵⁶ If the grotesque body was previously feared, the institution of tropical medicine further stigmatized this body by accentuating its immoral qualities and attaching the weight of science, government, humanity and religion in opposition to it:

... it has been suggested that the history of tropical medicine is appropriately vast in ‘the language of military and political conquest, the history of conflict in

⁵³ James Johnson, *The Influence of Tropical Climates on the European Constitution, Being a Treatise of the Principal Diseases to Europeans in the East and West Indies, Mediterranean, and Coast of Africa* (London: Thomas and George Underwood, 1821).

⁵⁴ Livingstone, ‘Tropical Climate and Moral Hygiene’, p.104.

⁵⁵ Livingstone, ‘Tropical Climate and Moral Hygiene’, p.98.

⁵⁶ See Wilkinson and Hardy, *Prevention and Cure*, pp.6-7.

biblical dimensions, between the heroic endeavours of human beings and the vast microscopic armies and resources of the animal kingdom'.⁵⁷

In his analysis of late-nineteenth-century tropical medicine debates, Livingstone observed that these arguments revolved around 'Victorian anatomy',⁵⁸ or as I contend here, a grotesque anatomy. At the present building of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine on Keppel Street in London's quiet collegial Bloomsbury, there are faint traces of this anatomy. The Art Deco building designed by architects Verner O. Rees and Percy Richard Morley Horder in 1929⁵⁹ is uncontroversial except for a series of gold-leaf animals – ornamental insects and pests called 'vectors of disease'⁶⁰ – that punctuate the building's first storey balconies at regular intervals. (Fig.3.2.2) These 'vectors' also evoke the body susceptible to the ravages of tropical disease. While such a body is never explicitly staged in this architecture, which is pristinely clad in Portland stone and described as 'splendidly confident and monumentally "moderne"',⁶¹ on the first floor above the entrance to the library, the visitor confronts a 1928 bas-relief by

⁵⁷ Roy MacLeod, 'Introduction', in Roy MacLeod and Milton Lewis (eds.), *Disease, Medicine, and Empire: Perspectives on Western Medicine and the Experience of European Expansion* (London: Routledge, 1988), p.6, cited by Livingstone, 'Tropical Climate and Moral Hygiene', p.107.

⁵⁸ Livingstone, 'Tropical Climate and Moral Hygiene', p.108.

⁵⁹ Rees (1886-1966) and Morley Horder (1870-1944) won the commission through a limited competition in June 1925. In Rees's obituary published in the magazine *Building*, the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine was noted as being exemplary of the architect's admiration for a pared down architectural style, 'Rees's particular contribution to post-1918 architecture was to simplify the somewhat ornate Neo-Classicism of the time; a particularly successful example of his work being the School of Hygiene and Tropical medicine ...'. See *Building*, (November 1966), v.211, p.108.

⁶⁰ Information provided by the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM). See also Mary Gibson, *London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine* (London: London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, 1995), pp.1-2, pp.26-7.

⁶¹ Obituary for Verner O. Rees, in *The Times*, London, 30 November 1966.

artist Henri Kennington, which features a man shielding a pregnant naked woman holding an infant, from a serpent.⁶² (Fig.3.2.3)



3.2.2 London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, Keppel Street façade and detail of 'vectors'.



3.2.3 Bas-relief by Henri Kennington, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine.

Originally designed for the front façade, the bas-relief was relegated to the interior because the pregnant nude was deemed visually offensive at the time of its installation.⁶³ Here, the miniscule gold-leaf vectors are metaphorically transformed into a fearsome mythological beast, which is manifested writ large. The grotesque aspects of the animal, the feminine and the infantile are intertwined in this motif, which was allegedly rejected

⁶² See Gibson, *London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine*, p.1.

⁶³ The bas-relief was carved from Portland stone to match the building's façade. When it was rejected for the façade, it was hastily painted over to disguise the stone and to blend in with the wooden door frame. Oral history related to author by Tilak Suriya of the Library and Archive Services, LSHTM.

not for the serpent but because of the odious female nude, heavy with child. Its placement atop the entrance of the library which is the font of knowledge and power, leaves little doubt as to where science, knowledge, civilization, progress and rational thinking, practices guaranteed and accommodated by a particular kind of architecture that is clean, white, functional, rectilinear and without ornamentation, might stand in relation to the animal, and the repressed feminine.

At this point, I will develop a discussion concerning the complex relationship between modern architecture and the animal.⁶⁴ In interpreting these animal stories, I find that the repressed architecture-animal relationship is a weak link, one barely touched upon, in extant architectural discourse. And while modern architecture may seem far removed from the medical disciplines, it is intriguing that the separate but indistinct conclusions proposed by psychoanalysis and tropical medicine concerning the grotesque body are ultimately rehearsed by modern architecture, in particular by one of its principal proponents, Le Corbusier.⁶⁵ For this discussion, I draw on feminist philosopher-architectural theorist Catherine Ingraham's critique of Le Corbusier's 'pack-donkey

⁶⁴ 'Modern architecture' (c.1900-1960s) is a twentieth-century canonic architectural movement, which peaked between the two World Wars, and has shaped contemporary architectural theory and discourse. As architectural theorist Alan Colquhoun states, 'Modern architecture ... was conceived in reaction to the supposed chaos and eclecticism of the various earlier nineteenth-century revivals of historical form'. See Alan Colquhoun, *Modern Architecture* (Oxford: Oxford: University Press, 2002), p.11; Vincent Scully, *Modern Architecture and Other Essays* (Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 2003), pp.74-87; William J. R. Curtis, *Modern Architecture Since 1900* (London: Phaidon, 1996).

⁶⁵ 'Le Corbusier' literally means 'the raven', which ironically associates this canonic figure of modern architecture with an animal.

architecture',⁶⁶ which focuses on the difficult relationship between architecture and the recalcitrant donkey.⁶⁷

'Pack-Donkey Architecture': Modern Architecture, The Classical Body, and The Billiard Room (reprise)

'Where is the animal in relation to the monument?' I ask this question in order to think about how the experiencing subject may relationally construct her intimate encounter with the animal subjects of the Billiard Room. I proposed that this encounter takes place through a critical metaphorical dimension, that is, through an 'overturning' of this architectural space. However, the preserve of the hotel as an architectural monument proves an extremely difficult barrier to negotiate even with its unwieldy menagerie. A monument suggests a lasting, immovable and finite architectural tribute to some worthy memory or experience, historical event, distinguished person(s), objects or spaces accorded with high cultural or aesthetic values.

Yet, the 'monument' is by no means an unproblematic notion since it is linked to symbols of authority and control. Literary critic Denis Hollier reminds us that the first article published by Bataille in the *Documents* dictionary of 1929 was devoted to architecture and rallied against the monument, which according to Bataille, represented those who had 'the authority to command and prohibit', and thus, 'smothered social

⁶⁶ Le Corbusier, 'The Pack-Donkey's Way and Man's Way', in *The City of Tomorrow and Its Planning*, trans. Frederick Etchells (London: Architectural Press, 1971), pp.11-18. My own interpretation of Le Corbusier's text follows this 1971 edition.

⁶⁷ Catherine Ingraham, 'The Burdens of Linearity: Donkey Urbanism', in *Architecture and the Burdens of Linearity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), pp.62-86.

life'.⁶⁸ Architectural theorist Joan Ockman points out that monumentality was by no means subdued in modern architecture.⁶⁹ In 1943, Sigfried Giedion, José Luis Sert and Fernand Leger wrote a joint paper which called for the rise of a new monumentality and aesthetics that would project the United States (where these authors sought refuge during the Second World War) as a 'powerful nation on the eve of world triumph'.⁷⁰ Indeed, the roles associated with a 'monument' and with 'architecture' as Ingraham's definition of the latter term shows, are not so dissimilar:

Architecture is, in some sense, the name of what acts in opposition to the animate. It is the embodied principle of the inert. It would be interesting to say that architecture negotiates the divide between the animate and the inanimate, but I think a more accurate description is that architecture controls or attempts to control this divide in order to maintain the propriety, the seamliness, of the body in space.⁷¹

If we follow Ingraham's definition of 'Architecture', the very act of designating or naming the hotel as monument and thus, as 'Architecture' installs a binary opposition between the hotel as 'Architecture' which represents the 'proper', and elements that are located outside this propriety. It is of no surprise then that the architectural history of the Billiard Room does not attribute its animals. But because these animals actively mediate our architectural experiences and transform our aesthetic, cultural and historical

⁶⁸ Georges Bataille, 'Architecture', in *Documents*, (December 1948), n.31. Reprinted in Georges Bataille, *Oeuvres Complètes*, 12 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1971-88), v.11, p.391, cited by Hollier, *Against Architecture*, p.47.

⁶⁹ For the modernists' architectural debates over monumentality, see for example, Joan Ockman (ed.), *Architecture Culture 1943-1968: A Documentary Anthology* (New York: Rizzoli, 1993), pp.27-8.

⁷⁰ Ockman, *Architecture Culture*, p.15. See also Sigfried Giedion, José Luis Sert and Fernand Leger, 'Nine Points on Monumentality', in Ockman, *Architecture Culture*, pp.27-30.

⁷¹ Ingraham, 'The Burdens of Linearity', p.54.

interpretations of this space, this monument at least, is obliged to deal with its animal-ridden past. The dilemma is how to do this.

In his manifesto, *The City of Tomorrow*, the grotesque body of the donkey enters the modernist narrative of Le Corbusier through, according to Ingraham, the familiar ruse of binary oppositions: man against beast, modern urbanism against bestial settlements, rationality against instinct, order against chaos.⁷² The donkey is chosen by Le Corbusier because it is the archaic symbol of the city, that is, an ancient city organized around animal paths and with the tendency to verge towards ‘congestion and disease’.⁷³ A beast of burden, the donkey literally configures the city by tracing out its paths, roads and alleys through aimless wandering.⁷⁴ The beast of burden inevitably determines the organic layout of each building, each square, each gate and each stone, and the result is a city of chaos.⁷⁵ The meandering path of ‘pack-donkey architecture’ becomes the ultimate representation of architectural disorder, which is for Le Corbusier, as Ingraham argues, not just a physical disaster but also spiritual mayhem.⁷⁶ He rallies the call for nations to overcome their ‘animal existence’ through orthogonality – emphasizing uprightness, verticality and the “rightness” of the right angle’, which in turn, are qualities he unreservedly equates with rationality, civilization, progress, culture, and self-control.⁷⁷

⁷² Ingraham, ‘The Burdens of Linearity’, p.70.

⁷³ Catherine Ingraham, *Architecture, Animal, Human: The Asymmetrical Condition* (London: Routledge, 2006), p.13.

⁷⁴ Ingraham, ‘The Burdens of Linearity’, pp.67-8.

⁷⁵ Ingraham, ‘The Burdens of Linearity’, p.68.

⁷⁶ Ingraham, ‘The Burdens of Linearity’, p.70.

⁷⁷ Le Corbusier, ‘The Pack-Donkey’s Way and Man’s Way’, in *The City of Tomorrow* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1982), p.43, cited by Ingraham, ‘The Burdens of Linearity’, p.67. Ingraham uses the 1982 edition of Le Corbusier’s text.

The *Modulor* – a hybrid anthropomorphic body which combines the ‘module’ (a controllable, finite and immutable measurement) and the ‘or’ (the purity of the golden section) – is installed as the modern but ultimately, classical statuesque body. And although the idea of anthropomorphic architecture claims to take on bodily attributes as the prime generator of architectural form, the established anthropomorphic paradigm and its resultant architecture – for example, the Vitruvian Man or the *Modulor* – manifest spaces that thrive on regularity while seeking to control and repress the animate, the fluctuating and the inconsistent. In short, modern architecture seeks to drive out any body that does not conform to its androcentric dimensions, which take after those of the classical statue. The *Modular* is manifested as upright and orthogonal, masculine, cultured, thinking, unencumbered and self-conscious:

When *man* begins to draw straight lines he bears witness that he has gained *control* of himself and that he has reached a condition of *order*. *Culture* is an orthogonal state of mind. Straight lines are not deliberately created. They are arrived when man is strong enough, determined enough, sufficiently equipped and sufficiently enlightened to desire and to be able to trace straight lines. In the history of forms, the moment which sees the straight line is a climax; behind it and within it lie all the arduous effort which has made possible this manifestation of liberty.⁷⁸

The *Modulor* is anti-animal.

Ingraham reminds us that the figure of the donkey is never properly ‘named’ in *The City of Tomorrow*, that is, the donkey is a general caricature for all things archaic, abhorred and

⁷⁸ Le Corbusier, ‘The Pack-Donkey’s Way’, p.13, cited by Ingraham, ‘The Burdens of Linearity’, p.68. Emphasis mine.

atavistic.⁷⁹ This treatment is not at all surprising given that the author was bent on composing a text he expected would be part of the modernist architectural canon. The donkey becomes all things primitive so that architecture may be positively marked as progressive, upright, rational, morally correct, hygienic, healthy, solid and noble. Most of all, its role in Le Corbusier's text is to insinuate the pestilential effects of a bestial order which infects a barbaric architectural past, or as Ingraham succinctly puts it:

The pack-donkey is the figure – in these (and other) fables – of a disorderly nature, of the chaotic and diseased body, of a barbaric architectural and urban past. The donkey makes the 'ruinous, difficult and dangerous curve of animality' and typifies the 'looseness and lack of concentration' of human beings in distraction – that is, the primitive and nonmodern human being. In all these guises, the donkey threatens the triumph of geometry – the architecture and urbanism of geometry, of positive action, of overcoming and ascending to power (nationhood), of sanity, nobility, and self-mastery.⁸⁰

The donkey is the lowly creature pitted against the heroism of the architectural 'line' – 'line' here refers in a double sense to the pedigree lineage of modern architecture from its pure classical origins and also to the perfection of the straight, uncompromising and rational line of architectural drawing, building and thinking.⁸¹ In order to exalt the condition of architectural linearity in all its different registers – physical, graphical,

⁷⁹ Ingraham, 'The Burdens of Linearity', p.67.

⁸⁰ Ingraham, 'The Burdens of Linearity', pp.67-8.

⁸¹ Le Corbusier saw his brand of modern architecture as the true heir to the purity of classical Greek and Roman architecture and scorned at the impure endeavours of the Beaux Arts architects before him. For an architectural analysis of Le Corbusier's classical lineage, see Colin Rowe, 'The Mathematics of the Ideal Villa: Palladio and Le Corbusier Compared', in *The Architectural Review*, (March 1947), v.CI, n.603, pp.101-4; Ingraham, 'The Burdens of Linearity', p.170.

psychical, geometrical, ideological – the body of the donkey must be made grotesque. The animal is framed as blind, deaf, monstrously proportioned and dim-witted.

This grotesque body is positioned in a grid where a series of oppositional manoeuvres are aggressively played out. To begin to think about the place of the animal in the monument, for example, the Billiard Room, it is necessary to take a critical view of the theoretical assumptions implicit in Le Corbusier's 'pack-donkey architecture'. The donkey is made to oppose architecture in order to give architecture its force.

However, even by picking the donkey as the negative term, I suggest that Le Corbusier remains ambivalent in his anti-animalistic architectural polemics. For example, in his attempt to wrest the origins of urbanism away from its organic bestial roots, Le Corbusier apparently appropriates the donkey's body in order to re-work its subversive existence for modern architecture and to support the architect's bid in reclaiming the originary act of founding the city:

I am a donkey, but a donkey with an eye; the eye of a donkey capable of sensations. I am a donkey with an instinct for proportion. I am and always will be an unrepentant visualist. When it's beautiful it's beautiful – but that's the *Modulor*! ... The *Modulor* lengthens donkeys' ears (here I refer to another donkey than my aforementioned self).⁸²

⁸² Le Corbusier cited by Ingraham, 'The Burdens of Linearity', p.62. Ingraham does not state where she extracts the quote from. It is not in the three Le Corbusier's texts discussed in Ingraham's paper, that is, *The City of Tomorrow*, *The Modulor*, and *Towards a New Architecture*. I suspect that this citation was drawn from Le Corbusier's unpublished archives and was not properly referenced by Ingraham.

In this passage, the strength, labour and unrelenting determination of the donkey instrumental for building the archaic city are selectively recognized by the architect who steps in and out of his metaphorical donkey 'suit', complete with prosthetic ears and eyes. In appropriating the donkey for modern architecture's cause, I argue following Ingraham that Le Corbusier unwittingly transforms the beast from the 'lowly' to an ambivalent, hybrid construct. The donkey becomes a figure which subsequently confounds simple binary definitions. It is simultaneously denigrated by modern architecture yet central to Le Corbusier's claim of modern architecture's rationality and progress. Discussing Le Corbusier's ambivalence, Ingraham notes:

The covert manner in which the beast of burden also stands as an oblique measure of human work, transgression, laziness, while retaining all the faults of an animal of 'nature' ('instinctive' rather than 'rational' motivations, indirection, enigmatic behaviour, apparent mindlessness and so on), complicates the opposition between the orthogonal and nonorthogonal in interesting ways.⁸³

As Ingraham also observes, 'Le Corbusier's writing on urbanism and architecture is a paragon of heedlessness, lack of self-mastery, lack of direction', that is, in taking up the donkey's position, if only metaphorically, Le Corbusier's text seems to be unconsciously influenced by 'donkey urbanism's swerve', which is the architectural panacea he cautions his readers against.⁸⁴ In the presence of the animal, the architect's position is also gradually overturned.

⁸³ Ingraham, 'The Burdens of Linearity', p.70.

⁸⁴ Ingraham, 'The Burdens of Linearity', p.73.

The zigzag journey taken with Le Corbusier's meandering donkey leads me back to the Billiard Room. Although Le Corbusier and I have differing views in relation to the animal, there is a point of convergence between his conundrum and mine, that is, the animal is central to our questions of architecture. In Le Corbusier's manifesto, the donkey is structural for his architectural vision in that the animal represents an archaic past that must be eradicated by modern architecture. The situation at the Billiard Room is altogether more complex because the animal cannot be conceived as the atavistic element that had to be salvaged by architecture. Here, the popularity of the animal overrides architecture not once but twice as on the two occasions when it was re-constructed, that is, during the replacement of the first Billiard Room with a new building in 1907 and its subsequent restoration in 1989, the animal stories did not wane but stubbornly persisted, re-adapted and multiplied. Displaced from the underbelly of the building that was sealed up during the 1907 re-building, these stories reclaimed another location – under the table – and thus, embedded themselves deeper into the Billiard Room's interior. Commenting on the place of the animal in relation to architecture, Ingraham suggests:

It is not surprising that in the presence of animals in general (metaphorical, mythical, or otherwise), we are forced to consider mechanisms of control, and simultaneously, waywardness, and thus to consider morality, rationality, order, civilization, cities, and architecture.⁸⁵

In the Billiard Room, all the mechanisms of control familiar to architecture are put to the test. The subjects we encounter are not that of the architect but those of the

⁸⁵ Ingraham, 'The Burdens of Linearity', p.80.

grotesque body – the animals, their wayward pursuers and their raconteurs. Here, there is no possibility of following Le Corbusier’s stance of flatly opposing the donkey to architecture. Needless to say, the significance of the Billiard Room and this monument would be impoverished without the tiger, pig and hog. So where and how can the animal appear in relation to the architectural representations of the Billiard Room? This discussion does not claim to have a conclusive answer to this question. However, raising a platform for critical debate concerning the much ignored and maligned architecture-animal connection within the realm of academic research already increases the stakes.

An intimate encounter with the grotesque bodies of the Billiard Room results in an overturning of this masculine frontier so that the subjects involved, their relationships, hierarchies and spaces are turned upside down. Although conventional architectural accounts, like those of modern architecture and the hotel’s emergent architectural history discussed earlier, may repress these unruly non-anthropomorphic subjects, they remain an integral part of this experiencing subject’s intimate encounter, and will inevitably surface, time and again, to rupture the classical architectural body of the Billiard Room. In the final section, I explore what I consider to be a new form of the grotesque by conducting an architectural interpretation of the Billiard Room through its own genre of children’s and illustrated stories.

Children's Stories in the Billiard Room

The animal story's invitation to pleasure is invariably an invitation to subversive pleasure ... it is the very instability of the anthropomorphized animal's identity which can make contact or even proximity with it so hazardous for those with an overblown sense of their own importance, power and identity.⁸⁶

Cultural theorist Steve Baker points out that an identification with animals is generally seen as a weakness, an act misguided by intuition and irrationality, and one that is ultimately 'wrong' because it consorts with an inexplicable 'other'.⁸⁷ Baker argues that, 'this prejudice constructs the animal as absolutely *other*, and by association those who identify with the animals themselves come to be seen as other'.⁸⁸ Feminist writer Ursula Le Guin emphasizes that this 'Other', which she names as 'women, children and animals', is 'the obscure matter upon which civilization erects itself, phallogically'.⁸⁹ In the late 1990s following major restoration work at the hotel, which was completed in 1991, the Billiard Room featured as an architectural centrepiece for two related genres, the children's story and the illustrated story. As these new 'animal stories' are circulated to another generation of readers, I am interested in how these stories negotiate the Billiard Room in gendered terms, bearing in mind that these stories were written for, and

⁸⁶ Steve Baker, *Picturing the Beast: Animals, Identity and Representation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), p.159.

⁸⁷ Baker, *Picturing the Beast*, pp.123-4.

⁸⁸ Baker, *Picturing the Beast*, pp.123-4.

⁸⁹ Ursula Le Guin, *Buffalo Gals and Other Animal Presences* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1990), p.10, cited by Baker, *Picturing the Beast*, p.124. For a philosophical discussion on the unthinkability of animals in Western philosophy, sexual difference and voice, see Jacques Derrida, 'The Animal That Therefore I am (More to Follow)', in Peter Atterton and Matthew Callarco (eds.), *Animal Philosophy* (London: Continuum, 2004), pp.113-28.

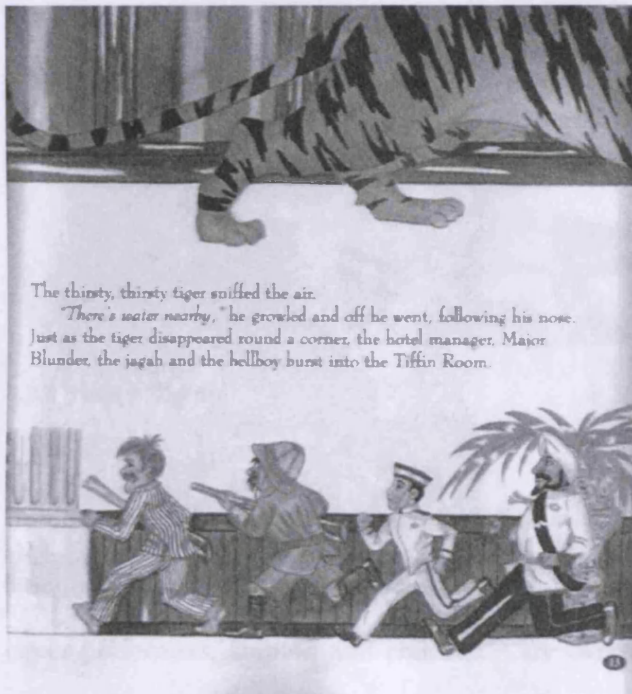
read by, the ‘Other’, that is, they were written to be read to children by their carers. How is the grotesque reflected in these texts? Through the media of children’s and illustrated stories, the present discussion returns to examine more closely the practice of storytelling as a critical form of architectural narrative for the Billiard Room.

Notably, the feminine practice of storytelling is associated with child caring and the space of the nursery. In these children’s stories, the grotesque, I will argue, exists on two levels. On one level, it re-presents the historical scenes within the Billiard Room through irreverent humour and caricature. On another level, it is the process of storytelling itself, and the structure of the child’s animal story, which associates itself with the genre of fairy tales and notions of the ‘wild’ feminine. Disseminating their irreverent content through storytelling which is a denigrated feminine practice, I suggest that these new animal stories overturn the sanctity of the masculine Billiard Room and the patriarchal architectural narrative asserted in the hotel’s emergent architectural history by actively shaping architectural expectations about this space. In these accounts, the colonial hotel is overturned, and resembles a zoo or a circus – a topsy-turvy and chaotic space occupied by eccentric hunters, managers, diners, watchmen, waiters and ‘boys’.

Kathy Creamer’s children’s book, *The Tiger Who Came to Tea*,⁹⁰ (Fig.3.2.4) is graced not only by the vivid orange-and-black striped tiger’s coat. This ‘terrifying’ chase is augmented by four characters who represent the hotel and follow the animal intruder across these pages. They are the manager pictured in blue-striped pyjamas deplorably dressed as he had attended the Raffles Hotel fancy ball party the night before and was just about to clamber into bed; Major Blunder, the only named ‘personality’ in the story

⁹⁰ Kathy Creamer, *The Tiger Who Came to Tea* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1999).

who is a self-professed 'famous hunter' and 'crackpot' wearing a safari suit and solar 'topee' favoured by cartoons that lampoon posturing colonials; the unmistakable 'boy' in uniform; and the immaculately attired and turbaned Sikh *jagah*. As 'the establishment', represented by these four characters in various forms of 'fancy dress' pursue the tiger, the distinctions between what is beautiful, natural, civilized and wild become uncertain.



3.2.4 The chase.

A similar pattern unfolds in another children's book by Kelly Chopard titled *Terry's Raffles Adventures*.⁹¹ Here, 'Terry, the tamest tiger in the world, and Chimp the chimp run away from the circus to Raffles Hotel in search of a friend in Singapore'.⁹² They escape from the circus troupe to the Raffles Hotel in search of an adventure after they spot a picture of a 'huge, smiling tiger' painted on a tourist bus called the 'Raffles Roller'.

⁹¹ Kelly Chopard, *Terry's Raffles Adventures*, illustrations by Patrick Yee (Singapore: Landmark Books, 1996).

⁹² Chopard and Yee, *Terry's Raffles Adventures*, synopsis printed on back cover of book.

In the end, Terry is chased into the Billiard Room and cowers under the billiard table as a ‘brutish brigadier’ points a gun at him. He is saved in the nick of time by members of his circus troupe who charge into the hotel – amongst them, a midget who takes on the brigadier, and a clown who brings order to the hotel. The story ends with the tiger under the billiard table playing with a brave little girl who declares him to be ‘the tamest tiger in the world’. (Fig.3.2.5)



3.2.5 ‘Help! A Tiger!’

In these two children’s stories, the established roles and boundaries – the excesses of the hotel, the civility of the circus, the social and intellectual sensibility of adults, colonials, circus performers, animals and children – are overturned. Here, the colonial hotel is portrayed as a zoo, a wild place even before the entry of its unruly animals. Perhaps, as Le Guin has observed, because these two tales are told from the perspective of the animal, there is ‘something in the structure of the talking-animal story which makes it inherently subversive of patriarchal culture’.⁹³

⁹³ Baker, *Picturing the Beast*, p.137.

Furthermore, the representation of the Billiard Room's animals in the form of illustrated images or cartoons compels the reader to confront its 'Other', 'primitive' or 'infantile' history since as Baker argues:

While the verbal narrative can to some extent glide over the surface of its own consistencies, the visual imaging of an animal character has always to deal with the stubborn ineradicable trace of its animal identity.⁹⁴

In his commentary on animal comic strips, Baker cites the work of Thierry Groensteen, who argues that the animal comic strip is adaptable, slippery and potentially subversive because it is in some senses an 'anti-genre', a hybrid product of two traditions – children's literature and satire.⁹⁵ 'In neither its childhood strand nor its satirical strand is it bound by the "rules" of orderly, rational narrative'.⁹⁶

In George Nonis's illustrated story *Raffles: The Untold Story*, the hotel's 'untold story' is notably related by the fictional and larger-than-life Baboo Singh, a third generation Sikh *jagah* who is a 'natural storyteller' and whose grandfather reputedly wrestled the pig and the boar.⁹⁷ Guaranteeing that 'the fleas of a thousand goats (may) infest my beard if this is not the absolute truth',⁹⁸ the doorman's hotel stories, like the children's books and Buck's stories about the tiger under the billiard table, capitalize on the hotel's animal association. Parts of *The Untold Story* poke fun at the portentous colonial hotel and its

⁹⁴ Baker, *Picturing the Beast*, p.131.

⁹⁵ Thierry Groensteen, 'Les Plus Grand Zoo du Monde', in Thierry Groensteen (ed.), *Animaux en Cases: Une Histoire Critique de la Bande Dessinée Animalière* (Paris: Futuropolis, 1987), pp.8-10, cited by Baker, *Picturing the Beast*, p.131.

⁹⁶ Baker, *Picturing the Beast*, p.131.

⁹⁷ Nonis, *The Untold Story*, pp.7-19.

⁹⁸ Nonis, *The Untold Story*, p.24.

idealized colonial occupant. Criticism is difficult given that Nonis was commissioned by the hotel to produce the book. However, I suggest that the ‘wild’ or undefined aspect of the animal offers some critical latitude, allowing for criticism of class, gender and race biases to be subversively aired as jokes.

For example, the issue of formal dress codes and the privilege of class enforced by the hotel is pushed to the limit by the naked pig apprehended by Baboo the First because it was allegedly trying to sneak into the hotel without being ‘dressed appropriately’.⁹⁹ (Fig.3.2.6) Nonis tells about how the arrival of the ‘Great White Hunter’ ‘put’ the animals ‘in their proper place’, by showing in one scene, ‘Stripes’ the tiger scowling to pose for a camera next to the hunter with an over-sized barreled gun (Fig.3.2.6) and in another scene, an indisposed hunter, coiled up from neck to knee by an irritated snake.¹⁰⁰ (Fig.3.2.6) The author-cartoonist also snipes colonial stalwarts like Rudyard Kipling in this account:

Stripes was attracted to Raffles because he had heard so much about the food there. Rudyard Kipling, his favourite food writer, had strongly recommended a meal at the hotel! ‘Hmm!...Sounds Goo-ood! I’ll go get dressed and dine *in* for a change’.¹⁰¹

Stripes appears dressed in tails and a top hat and is subsequently found juggling billiard balls *on* the billiard table. (Fig.3.2.6) In Nonis’s illustrated story, the colonial figure is pictured as synonymous with the Billiard Room’s grotesque fauna. While it seems that

⁹⁹ Nonis, *The Untold Story*, p.17.

¹⁰⁰ Nonis, *The Untold Story*, pp.28-9.

¹⁰¹ Nonis, *The Untold Story*, p.60.

the animal is the subject of ridicule, its inherent association with the colonial hotel subsequently renders the latter on the receiving end of what may be interpreted as subversive criticism. The experiencing subject's intimate encounter with these new animal stories and her ensuing laughter constitute, I argue, a form of the grotesque in that the masculine authority associated with the Billiard Room is re-appropriated by the 'obscure matter' of society, namely women and children who are the stories' key recipients.



3.2.6 Animal antics.

A key aspect of storytelling, which makes this practice grotesque for mainstream architectural and historical narrative is its link to the female figure. According to feminist writer Angela Carter, the 'archetypal storyteller' is significantly pictured as an 'old woman sitting by the fireside, spinning'.¹⁰² In her cultural history of fairy tales and their tellers, literary historian and writer Marina Warner argues that storytelling is a

¹⁰² Angela Carter, 'Introduction,' in *The Virago Book of Fairy Tales*, Angela Carter (ed.) (London: Virago, 1990), pp.ix-xxii; here p.x.

subversive feminine practice. While fairy tales are presumed to be restricted to the nursery, Warner proposes that this domestic context was a necessary mode of containment since ‘the interconnections of storytelling with heterodox forms of knowledge, with illicit science and riddles’ ultimately challenged established institutions where ‘proper’ knowledge and history was produced.¹⁰³

‘The orality of the genre remains a central claim’ with the fairy tale teller often connected to a female figure, for example, Mother Goose, Scheherazade, the Sibyls or the Queen of Sheba.¹⁰⁴ Conveyed in a manner that ‘imitates speech, with chatty asides, apparently spontaneous exclamations, direct appeals to the imaginary circle around the hearth, rambling descriptions, gossipy parentheses, and other bedside or laplike mannerisms that create an illusion of collusive intimacies, of home, of the bedtime story, the winter’s tale’,¹⁰⁵ storytelling deftly negotiates the strict divide between domestic (feminine) and public (masculine) realms by locating itself at the threshold between these spaces.

Significantly, Warner proposes that storytelling is a gendered practice, which in turn, relies on spatial conditions linked to a disregarded maternal routine:

... women’s care for children, the prevailing disregard for both groups, and their presumed identity with simple folk, the common people, handed them fairy tales

¹⁰³ Marina Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and Their Tellers* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1994), p.xx.

¹⁰⁴ Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde*, p.25.

¹⁰⁵ Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde*, p.25.

as a different kind of nursery, where they might set their own seedlings and plant out their own flowers.¹⁰⁶

In an English engraving from the seventeenth century entitled *Tittle-Tattle, or the Several Branches of Gossiping*, storytelling was shown to spread in spaces where women gathered alone.¹⁰⁷ (Fig.3.2.7) These spaces were usually related to women's labour and play, for example, at the maternal bed lying-in after childbirth, at the baker's, the laundry, the market, the church, the baths and the alehouse. Here, voices were raised so that 'the story itself becomes the weapon of the weaponless'.¹⁰⁸ The suspicion towards old wives' tales, associated with mythic feminine figures like Mother Goose, came from a fear of the conspiratorial whispers of women, who in fairy tales repeated their verbal art in the form of riddles, spells and an ability to communicate with animals.¹⁰⁹ Warner introduces the sixteenth-century engraving of the Dutch saint Aelwater (meaning 'All-True') who was pictured riding through the city on an ass, holding a squealing piglet under one arm and a magpie perched on her head.¹¹⁰ (Fig.3.2.8) Aelwater represents the 'fighting, nagging, scolding, malicious, prattling, tongue-wagging busybody',¹¹¹ emblematic of the storyteller who relies on gossip and chatter to spin a tale.

Although there are no female figures in the Billiard Room's animal stories, I bring up Warner's argument because it engenders the practice of storytelling as feminine. It also raises important questions as to how the architectural knowledge of a masculine space

¹⁰⁶ Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde*, p.xix.

¹⁰⁷ Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde*, pp.40-1.

¹⁰⁸ Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde*, p.412.

¹⁰⁹ Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde*, p.412.

¹¹⁰ Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde*, p.32.

¹¹¹ Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde*, p.32.

like the Billiard Room is constructed by repressing the feminine practice that fundamentally sustains it. Philosopher Michel de Certeau argues that storytelling is the ‘delinquent’¹¹² double of history while Jane Rendell observes that it is a political activity which strives to reclaim a history dominated by ‘men’s anecdotes’ through a telling that works attentively and critically against an established masculine culture.¹¹³

As the Billiard Room’s new animal stories suggest, storytelling when engaged, is seldom a non-partisan activity. It entwines the storyteller and the audience to the subject matter, ‘one tries to keep oneself out, but cannot’.¹¹⁴ By inserting these new children and illustrated animal stories into the space of architectural history, I argue that the compulsion to tell stories about the Billiard Room is neither limited to the nursery nor is it an activity restricted to children and their carers. What seems fascinating is how this feminine practice of storytelling has defined and continues to shape the architectural experience of the Billiard Room.

Notably, I am struck by how the staff who have been carefully primed to point out exactly where the tiger lay (under the billiard room), tend to stray from the hotel’s official line towards some form of spatial speculation about the tiger’s whereabouts. There is a split between what they are told to disclose and what they desire to tell.¹¹⁵ There are different variations of the tiger story, each laced with the storyteller’s personal opinion, for example, where the animal ‘crime scene’ may be pinpointed in the context of today’s

¹¹² Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), p.123.

¹¹³ Jane Rendell, ‘An Atlas of the Welsh Dresser’, in Ken Ehrlich and Brandon Labelle (eds.), *Surface Tension: Problematics of Site*, (New York: Errant Bodies, 2003), pp.283-92, here p.291.

¹¹⁴ Nicholas Royle, ‘The Uncanny: An Introduction’, in *The Uncanny* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), pp.1-38; here p.16.

¹¹⁵ From author’s own ‘small talk’ with the hotel staff.

Billiard Room, how big or small the tiger was, and even mythologizing the Billiard Room as the location where the last tiger on the island was slain.¹¹⁶



3.2.7 'Tittle-Tattle': 17th century engraving showing storytelling and gossip in places where women gathered.



3.2.8 'Word of Mouth': 16th century engraving of storyteller Aelwater.

¹¹⁶ In the hotel's private archives, there is a dossier of 'hotel facts' which the staff are given to read, and presumably, to commit to memory. The write-up emphasizes, 'The tiger was not under the billiard table but under the billiard room, which was raised'.

In this interpretation, I strove to reclaim the feminine practice of storytelling and the children's and illustrated animal stories about the Billiard Room as new forms of the grotesque and the 'wild' feminine, which I argue are central to an intimate encounter with the Billiard Room. In my research I also found that the feminine figure of the Billiard Room's storyteller has, interestingly, been transposed to personalities who were ambivalently placed in relation to this colonial space, that is, they were excluded being non-Western but were also undeniably central to its spatial definition since they played pivotal roles in its animal stories. One of these figures was the *jagah*, whose accounts have been fictionalized by Nonis, and whose adventures I have interpreted in this discussion. Another storyteller was the Chinese 'boy' who first spotted Stripes near the Billiard Room in 1902.

Like the *jagah* who was caricatured, the 'boy' was also not given a name and feminized for scuttling away when he saw the tiger. However, it is interesting that the 'boy', a generic name for the odd-jobs person in the hotel was, like Nonis's fictional Baboo Singh, empowered through the stories he narrated about the Billiard Room. Commenting that the tiger asleep on one of the billiard tables in the hotel was a 'yarn, which has become a part of the Far Eastern animal lore',¹¹⁷ Buck suggests that the hotel's 'Chinese boy-of-all-jobs' had taken up the role of the storyteller:

To this day there is a Chinese boy-of-all-jobs in the Raffles who tells how he met the emergency when the tiger entered the billiard room. (Long since the boy who actually figured the in the episode left the employ of the hotel.) He had just

¹¹⁷ Buck and Anthony, *Wild Cargo*, p.202.

started to sweep the floor when he thought he heard something stirring. Looking up, he saw a tiger stretching itself on one of the tables in the far corner of the room. His first thought was to run for help. Then, so his story goes, he got a better hunch. For, after all, the main idea was to get the tiger out of the room. Taking a billiard ball from a convenient rack, he let it fly straight at the animal. Then he fled without waiting to see how good his marksmanship had been. But he feels certain that he must have hit the tiger for when, a few seconds later, he saw it retreat down the street, it had a perceptible limp! [F]or a tip, this boy tells his story to any tourist who cares to listen. He changes the details here and there and by the next year it ought to be a brand-new story.¹¹⁸

For this experiencing subject encountering the ‘new’ animal stories today, the masculine ‘hunt’ is transformed into a carnivalesque spatial story, that is, an ongoing and participative activity to follow the animal trail and to invent points in, under, or around the Billiard Room where the animals might have traipsed. The architectural space of the Billiard Room becomes an accessory to its new animal stories. These stories offer a different architectural encounter from the one set in place by the hotel’s planners and architects, which is focused on architectural forms and factual historical accounts. The stories offer an experience that is engaged, tentative, open to misinterpretation and inventive construction. They change the ways in which this experiencing subject occupies the Billiard Room, for instance, becoming an insider to a network of conversation and hearsay generated by a shared interest in these carnivalesque stories and the pleasure of telling them anew. These stories overturn the Billiard Room: from masculine space to feminine space, from structure to accessory, from passive scene of the

¹¹⁸ Buck and Anthony, *Wild Cargo*, pp.204-5.

crime to contaminable key evidence, from fact to fiction, from architect-centred to storyteller-invented.

To recapitulate, in this chapter I have argued for the metaphorical subversion of the Billiard Room by interpreting this space through the visceral notion of the grotesque body. I have explored the criticality of the grotesque animal by tracing its historical trajectory in the disciplines of psychoanalysis, tropical medicine and modern architecture. I have also argued that the grotesque figures associated with the Billiard Room cannot simply be categorized as 'lowly' in relation to the colonial structure. Instead, the grotesque figures in the Billiard Room are more complex being both excluded by patriarchal colonial culture yet central to the animal accounts, and thus, central to the architectural experience of the Billiard Room. I have highlighted the criticality of hybrid figures like the *jagah*, the Chinese 'boy' and storytellers who make this masculine space grotesque, that is, a fleshy and topsy-turvy space, teeming with unregulated variations, and open to misinterpretation and subversive reinvention. In my interpretation, I argue for a critical reading of the animal as a metaphor for the grotesque and the feminine. Manifested whether through the *jagah*, the Chinese 'boy', the ridiculed head teacher in pyjamas, the 'wild' characters of the new children's animal stories or the denigrated feminine storyteller, the animal and its repressed metaphorical subjects are, I argue, integral rather than oppositional to the architectural formation of this space. By reading these animal stories and their subjects metaphorically, this architectural interpretation reconsiders the critical role of the repressed feminine in what is commonly perceived to be a masculine space.

In the final piece of spiderwriting which appears at the close of the present argument, I creatively draw on the fictional perspectives of the *jagah* as storyteller in order to relate more architectural stories through tropical fauna, thus perpetuating not only the feminine storytelling tradition of the Billiard Room but exploring, albeit speculatively, the critical relationship between animals and this architectural monument. To the question I asked earlier, that is, ‘Where is the animal placed in relation to this architectural monument?’ I suggest that the animal is the repressed feminine foundation, which shores up and gives shape to the masculine Billiard Room. The animal operates from ‘under the table’ and underlies the architectural narratives of this space. The persistent ‘return’ of the Billiard Room’s animals reminds me of another animal-architecture scene suggested by novelist Franz Kafka:

Leopards break into the temple and drink the sacrificial vessels dry; this is repeated over and over again; finally it can be calculated in advance and becomes part of the ceremony.¹¹⁹

The Billiard Room’s animal stories are exuberant and compelling. They persuade repetition. They can ‘be calculated in advance’ and have become ‘part of the ceremony’ of this space. This is why these animal stories will be compulsively re-told, inseparable from the Billiard Room’s architectural history.

¹¹⁹ Franz Kafka, *The Collected Aphorisms*, trans. M. Pasley (London, 1994), p.6, cited by Baker, *The Postmodern Animal* (London: Reaktion Press, 2000), p.133.

3.2.9a Inventory #118

RH/BR/1987/118/encl. 118.1-118.10

RAFFLES HOTEL

For File: Billiard RoomInventory #118

[Sixteen pages of handwritten memoirs, photographs and newspaper cuttings found in the Billiard Room's foundations, during excavations works in November 1989.]

Notes:

When the contractors excavated the foundations of the present Billiard Room, this cache of handwritten notes was recovered from a rusty chocolate tin. There were also many rusty tins littered on the same site. It is believed that these papers belonged to one Hari Singh who had allegedly witnessed the tiger affair, and had shown great courage in subsequent showdowns with a wild hog and a pig. Very little is known about Mr. Singh and there are no existing biographical records to corroborate with these notes. However, the accompanying newspaper clippings are verified to be genuine.

It is believed that these pages form a part of Mr Singh's memoirs although no other pages have been recovered. These notes provide interesting 'behind-the-scene' perspectives of the hotel and its wild animal association. They also offer accounts of tropical 'wild life', which are contradictory to the colonial hunt narratives produced at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

During the preparation of this report, there was already keen public interest in Mr. Singh's stories. Queries came from two authors of children's stories, a cartoon illustrator and an architectural researcher. As this material is subject to more detailed investigation, it will not be released to the general public until further notice.

Glossary of Malay, Chinese and Anglo-Indian terms used in Hari Singh's memoirs:

Pukkah wallah: Indian servant whose job is to work the huge fans to cool a room

Kebun: Gardener

Sahib and Memsahib: Respectful titles used for European gentlemen and ladies

Penang Hokkien: Dialect spoken by the Straits Chinese in Penang Island

Chicak: Common house lizard

Baju Kebaya: Shapely outfit worn by Malay women

Orang puteh: literally 'white men', or Europeans

Bilal: Muslim cleric

Touchang: ponytail

Haribau: Tiger

Hantu: Ghost

Limaui: Lemon

Sew Too: Roasted pig

Jering: Net

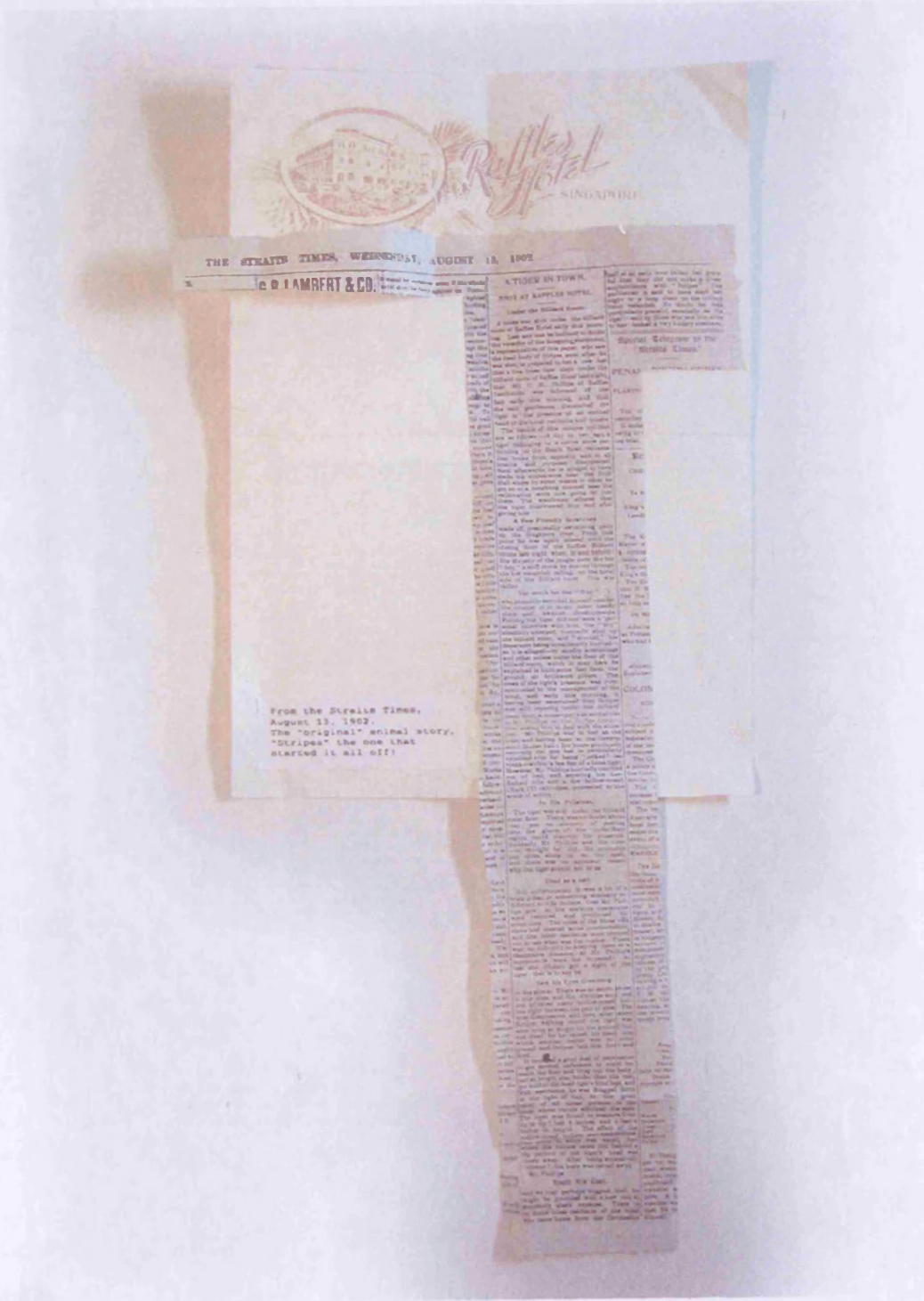
Ambili: Fetch

catalogued by: L. Chee

date: 22 November 2005

3.2.9b The *Jagah*'s memoirs and clippings.





From the Straits Times, August 13, 1922. The "original" animal story, "Stripes" the one that started it all off!



Siamese soldiers have been sent to help in checking gang-robbery in the Siamese districts near the Burma frontier.

A TIGER ALARM.

THE recent tiger incident in which one of these "terrors of the jungle" was shot beneath one of the billiard tables at Raffles Hotel seems to have warmed up the fears and apprehensions of certain members of this community. Last night a resident telephoned to the Orchard Road police station from a house on Bukit Timah Road and imparted the alarming information that there was a tiger in his compound. Thoroughly excited, and with visions of a desperate encounter in the dark among the trees, a party of police in charge of the inspector made for the house, all armed in anticipation of a fight, and each carefully examined his rifle and looked to his cartridges on the way. The chagrin and disappointment of the party, then, can well be imagined when on arriving, they saw a tame elephant in the compound, which had evidently got among the trees simply for the sake of cool and quiet. The elephant was being engaged by contractors in some building operations in the district and had strayed from its keeper.

that the one of whose it was would Laird:

Mr. Circus, mornin' that h will op new m Compa jockey land's Edith. The t starla lance a foot ju Capala present case.

The Charib Love a vaart largest a vasee not bee direct the ca

From the Straits Times.
September 17th, 1902.
An article referring to the
Raffles tiger shooting,
somehow the tiger is now
under the TABLE, not
the building!



Raffles Hotel
SINGAPORE

THE STRAITS TIMES

FRIDAY, JANUARY 20, 1903. PRICE 2 CENTS.

PYTHON AT RAFFLES

The Famous Tiger Hunt recalled by a Snake Capture.

It was not a product of the East.

When the lion, who had the big animal slain, the dining room of the hotel at about 11.15 o'clock this morning he saw what he took to be a snake or rather he was certain that some one had slipped overboard. He was not at all alarmed, but he was a little surprised at the sight, but as he was not a product of the East, he was not at all alarmed.

After the fashion of his kind the python which the lion had slain, he was not at all alarmed, but he was a little surprised at the sight, but as he was not a product of the East, he was not at all alarmed. The python which the lion had slain, he was not at all alarmed, but he was a little surprised at the sight, but as he was not a product of the East, he was not at all alarmed.

By the way, the lion and the python which the lion had slain, he was not at all alarmed, but he was a little surprised at the sight, but as he was not a product of the East, he was not at all alarmed. The python which the lion had slain, he was not at all alarmed, but he was a little surprised at the sight, but as he was not a product of the East, he was not at all alarmed.

From the Straits Times.
January 20th, 1903.
A snake this time! We're
Developing quite a reputation!



THE STRAITS TIMES. FR

BOAR HUNT AT RAFFLES.

Another Wild Shikar on the Hotel Verandah.

No sportsman in Asia should miss paying a visit to Raffles, for he never knows what a rare bag may be picked up on the big verandah of a morning before breakfast. Within the past few months we have had: Goudas, the chronicle, a tiger, Raffles, the billiard room, and Raffles, the python, chase to end, all on the verandah. Yesterday morning a fine day, an exciting wild boar hunt, followed a desperate conflict between the mounted Sikh Japah who stands at the doorway of the hotel and the extraordinary brute that sought to pass the portal. The Japah in question who is known to practically every game brother on earth as well as to residents in the Peninsula, holds some appointments up near Pahang, and stands over his feet in his stockings. His girth is generous and he weighs about eighty stone. Recently he came into a lullaby from an aggressive game of similar dimensions to his own. The Japah consisted of a full dress evening suit, which, when worn in the morning is destruction with an immense pug nose, a such and new lemon-colored coat, but to the naturally imposing form of the Japah an additional air that was hearty and picturesque. In this suit he met the wild boar.

The circumstances of the conflict as narrated by Mr. Chaytor and other officials of the hotel management who were spectators to the unusual spectacle, furnish much information which will enrich the soul of every sportsman, and every student of wild animal life when such life is considered under the most favorable conditions which man obtains with wild animal life when considered with life in a first class modern hotel.

It seems that at about three minutes past nine o'clock yesterday morning Mr. C. Chaytor was standing in a motor car on the verandah of the hotel when he was attracted by the voice of the Sikh Japah shouting in a great roar for help. On looking down at the spot whence the shout came Mr. Chaytor was still further amazed to see the Japah—dressed in his best suit of clothes—just wrestling desperately with a wild boar. The situation was so far from absolutely without precedent that Mr. Chaytor was the first to see the tiger and the python had avoided with the Japah. Therefore he was the first to see the Japah. The Japah roared and the boar ran. Then, still panting, he roared up the staircase, shouting a loud shout, and charged the boar. He gave the animal a couple of blows, whereupon it fled to the billiard room—the Japah brought with him the tiger—with the Japah and Mr. Chaytor in hot and furious pursuit. From this retreat he presently emerged with great caution, and then showed his head up Bras Basah Road with a big hungry snout behind him. By testimony from the scene of the chase, he was still running and—was given the words of our informant—“cursing with pain and rage.”

The word had to be sent to Maynard for repairs, so the encounter was by no means a one-sided affair.

WIRE NEWS. (The following are the latest news from the Straits Settlements and F.M.S.)

From the Straits Times.
February 27th, 1901.
My moment of fame!
I was only doing my duty.
the damned swine was
inappropriately attired!
This is a day I'll remember
and shall be telling
my grandchildren about.

From the Straits Times,
September 6th, 1904.
Lighting may never strike
twice in the same place,
but at the Raffles,
pigs certainly do!

[illegible]

THE ENDLESS TUNNEL
Now the Kallang Tunnel contractor
Has been duly sighted and sealed.

time to hunt their bee. As they explain, they visit
most flowers, which have some known nectar
following the floral scent evolution. The bees have a long
a whole period or several. Stanford Raffles has been
known and is nearly backed in all conditions.
Particularly visiting these knife-wielding visitors,
Stanford Raffles means his sagging and teeth and you to
all to have approach his mouth.

Every morning in (Stanford Raffles walked) around in the
living hall for a sighting of the large letters by the head
bottle, Tan Koon Yoo. An evening near, Tan Koon Yoo, alone
to sleep, and with some grass of walking his feet, he
shook to a wrinkled yellow green, which this green flower
is enhanced by a shiny head of berries of not slightly
edges, blackish hair. It is curled back into an upward
curly, a twisted texture to the least fashion in
the West and finished off with pruning the loopholes of
Brylcreen Tan Koon. Tan Koon Yoo, unavoidable trial cases
young pruning habits and a unavoidable trial cases
one of the grants. As we felt as the pruning cases
and young up lighter. Tan Koon Yoo, unavoidable trial cases
Tan Koon Yoo, unavoidable trial cases
shiffly, unavoidable trial cases. Tan Koon Yoo, unavoidable trial cases
again who unavoidable trial cases. This unavoidable trial cases.

Despite the pretty busy, unavoidable trial cases
computer, study unavoidable trial cases and unavoidable trial cases.
I have unavoidable trial cases in this unavoidable trial cases hotel as
its unavoidable trial cases.

As one of the most unavoidable trial cases in
Singapore, the Raffles Hotel employs over thirty
people. Amongst these are the unavoidable trial cases and
soft-footed unavoidable trial cases who unavoidable trial cases to the
living hall in the garden, the unavoidable trial cases and unavoidable trial cases
Chinese boys who look like unavoidable trial cases in their unavoidable trial cases
beds might unavoidable trial cases when unavoidable trial cases the unavoidable trial cases
of their unavoidable trial cases and unavoidable trial cases, the unavoidable trial cases
another unavoidable trial cases unavoidable trial cases as to unavoidable trial cases with his unavoidable trial cases
side open, and these unavoidable trial cases who unavoidable trial cases
hatched after the unavoidable trial cases of the unavoidable trial cases unavoidable trial cases since
their unavoidable trial cases, the unavoidable trial cases unavoidable trial cases as on an
unavoidable unavoidable trial cases unavoidable trial cases unavoidable trial cases unavoidable trial cases
unavoidable trial cases unavoidable trial cases, and lots of unavoidable trial cases unavoidable trial cases
They are unavoidable trial cases trying to unavoidable trial cases the unavoidable trial cases. As unavoidable trial cases unavoidable trial cases
and unavoidable trial cases are unavoidable trial cases, the unavoidable trial cases unavoidable trial cases unavoidable trial cases.

That as the cool was being their partner over the
 stumps and the thinnest cool was grazing
 up with a new set of sharp and most clearly
 the head master hit his mark. There was some
 possible slipping but the cool trained by the hot
 joining of the thinnest cool and the head
 master can be seen. Amazing! Even though the
 tiger was head as a nail, the head master still
 refused to go near to retrieve his trophy. The
 second of great go here, the second of great go here,
 volunteered. Working the Tiger house, I had to almost
 my foot was under of wood and pulled out the
 creature from under the Dillard room. It was a fine
 specimen measuring 4 feet 8 inches from tip to tip and
 5 feet 8 inches in height. The Prime went up to check
 on the surface of the head master who was still
 going irregularly and looked for him in his torn
 Dillard. No wonder he refused to give for a
 photograph with the head tiger.

The head master arrived the cool not knowing the
 but strongly red hair, a rather complexion, black
 eyes, white horned glasses and was old only in
 complexion of black, green and purple
 stripes. The cool set up giving Amazing!!! There
 something was around the shoot. Try of it
 thought he should be allowed to let that rifle. To all
 ideas to this position, Chang was trained by the Prime
 to assist the head master. The thinnest
 cool around the young tiger and wanted to go home to
 his mother and leave the tiger option to end
 performance. They answered their behavior when
 for who missed the tiger and hit the Dillard
 room with poles. I do not know what about the tiger
 now. A young tiger in Dillard, only thinnest cool
 or a shillard Chinese boy who was clearly enjoying
 his lionatorial habits, not using a bit that he
 wanted promotion of himself into tiger, when
 changed the lionatorial call to yell against the tiger
 into a yell against himself.

disrupting play as they vied in and out of the room checking bills and changing silver trays. The Prime continued to ring his morning bell but order was not as quite restored after that morning of the tiger.

Because it is hard for outsiders to distinguish one Chinese boy from another, and because Cheong is already too famous to bother with any story, frequent, other Chinese boys began to profit from recounting the tiger tale themselves. Their stories are not always consistent. They now feasted of where the tiger was found were invented. For example, the tiger was reportedly killed where the billiard table and for a generous tip the boy will patiently show you which one of the four tables in the Red Room. The tiger reportedly walked into the marble living room, jumped a joint of meat in the kitchen. There are also stories that the tiger was not shot, that it escaped leaping from Ben's Back Room after it was hit by a billiard ball.

Cheong buried himself for the next few weeks by giving a running commentary of his experience to a stream of Chinese. One boy observed him say one day that he found the tiger asleep on the billiard table and had prodded it with a cane. Little later, Anging the conviction did not lie too easily. Everyone started in on the tiger edition. The Prime assigned the Chinese boys a new lot of ironing at the green baize cloth of the billiard tables every morning. Another boy was tasked to keep the indentured space of the Billiard Room tidy. The Billiard Room became a sort of home to locked inmates when told there were no bedrooms next to the Billiard Room one of this species eventually pitched his tent next to it. The American cook usurped the French cook's authority by creating a new sort of 'late tiger organs', which claim to increase the libido. The soap is very popular although it is actually nothing more than tinned hair cream. They also insist on scrubbing the lick in the Billiard Room, often

Facing a good light, I went to stand at my usual position
no longer but I regarded my opponent when I saw he had
been by a looking and posing motion making a bow-like
for the Bullard room. But when it was not at all a well
big I started and gave chase but my opponent had that
morning was also per. I started half and my heart pointed
when he was when though I had been broken into a trot
by this time, the one had gathered outside the front
door. I was very obdurate then within and was probably
suffering from the heat, which continued to swell my
stomach as I looked for the first big.

The opponent was started that the will bear with
when a bullock's upper and urged me to bring it in close
or back. The when the other was ahead of me and the
back, and went into being in his net when the Bullard room
The Prime stroke of my opponent's shot at TEN shot.
Despite my such strength, I managed to grab into the
fluffy hind legs of my opponent when we, two were
wandering together. We were taken in a will embrace
for some time. Then to force, whether to shock,
up to again I had never been lifted by a bear
before. It was not a pretty sight for the onlookers
who saw two growing fighters in tight embrace, and
complacent arms and legs flailing here and there. If you
hadn't attended a bear as I have, you will appreciate that

drawn by the Chinese dog

In the meantime, just as the Bullard room

became the scene for tiger encounters, it
soon became the conference centre for two
other kinds, which I can show per- and

involvement with. On at February day, I came from
to face with an enemy who needed my immediate guide.

That morning also marked my thirty-fifth birthday. The

thunderer who who were along because's left spot for
me, looked to suspect the tin food regime in house of

the special occasion even the extraordinary

event, was a need helping of their spirit

on the one inevitable. Unfortunately being not

needed anything proper for our in north, the fresh

ingredients were urgent, and I spent a good part of the
next morning from then in the kitchen. It was probably

the only attack we so used to have when we
that it was the victory against the objection of my real

food

the matter is more intricate than brother tooth to chew combat. All the while, I was thinking what holy part to hell onto, where to turn, which foot to treadle!

mastered all my feet ball, ping pong and cricket skills

But pickle my lobster! It was not nearly so anything a

beer, which kept grinning at me! The Heaven is each

garden was with all of the
Bee found with me here.

Dear Tom with my sincere
best wishes, when I started out to me to grab one of his cold when I
realized that my fingers were just too flat to job at the
factory and thought a when might just to the trade. It was hard
to disintegrate myself from our old embrace but managed to

spread a thick, white downy billowing a few other plants.

emerged upon Deer. Stronger and apparently unrelated
entomically from my throat. I had seen one Red Indian shield

to the same cell in the morning and this seemed like an
easy way to do it. The animal was not too far from the
cell and the animal was not too far from the cell.

after the women got new wraps. The confused breast
wooden and why we had suddenly parted ways and wished when

the Ballroom Room. Bigger! I wanted to crowd under that
space. It was with too tight for a man of my size. Beer

showered into the police station - who was being shown the

Some started at me not to touch the Dilbert Room and ordered me to get out at once. Blubber howl! The bear wriggled his

bottom of water then 1 c/c and averaged from Brown Beach Road

before I could grab hold of it again. I now went to Reynolds, the lead factor, to be treated for a worm, and arrived to see handlers affected from lack of ventilation when Bear gripped me about so firmly

Although I chimed no bells all winter but the bear

The anti-driving movement took hold best struck
friends under the British moon even more popular.

to their special! with Billiard Room means. The

Chinese boys find new interest in the tiger.

stresses and interest extra tips by organizing guidelines and basic trails, cheap, cheap for you only, etc.

These trails covered my attraction like the myth

willard tubular, the joint of bone of chewed by the tiger, the willard was used to poke it, and the archer

but when I had brown up a horse to spare the
with horse the thing was having been examined to

will bear. The Chinese boy also promised to
procure a photograph from the hunter A. the

headmaster could not be contacted, I usually bid the house. The Billiard Room had become deserted

that the Bow had not money needed to be raised

to build a larger and stronger structure

I didn't find like making peace with Pig. Unlike Bear, Pig had taken an instant dislike to me. Only once, only once, I remember. The worst, upturned and upturned. The man roared and now jumping then Bear. This speech more important and pertinent. The man roared and I was on with my own shouts of making pig. I was too. Making pig. I remember that pig was here or there and the man was there and that he had to make a pig from his position when the Billiard Room got up to make a pig for the man's pocket. The man roared and I was taking him from the hotel guests, who were coming on and stopping for the time when. The man roared that I was to stop eating like a pig and come out from under the Billiard Room at once. The man roared the head of the pig, which had an enormous appetite. It had killed the cow and was killed by a man's opponent. Pig ran into the upper when the Billiard Room I was there. The man roared that he had had enough of the man and was not with any more pigs.

If you had a pig never at home time in the same place, the Billiard Room had a great attraction and when you got into it and saw a pig on the man's Bear, I was after. I was after with and had the man's Bear, I had a great chance to make a pig on the man. The man roared and I was on with my own shouts of making pig. I was too. Making pig. I remember that pig was here or there and the man was there and that he had to make a pig from his position when the Billiard Room got up to make a pig for the man's pocket. The man roared and I was taking him from the hotel guests, who were coming on and stopping for the time when. The man roared that I was to stop eating like a pig and come out from under the Billiard Room at once. The man roared the head of the pig, which had an enormous appetite. It had killed the cow and was killed by a man's opponent. Pig ran into the upper when the Billiard Room I was there. The man roared that he had had enough of the man and was not with any more pigs.

Billiard room men are in high hand. The Indian were there but his partner with his bagpipes and headed to ruble. He got from where the Billiard room to the other end of the garden. The Bear is so surprised with the increased activity around this corner that he has asked the architect to remove and transfer from New Bridge Road to give him a new design for the Billiard room. As we await the new building the billiard tables continue to be being polished and polished every morning. This job is carried out by the Prince himself who is convinced that these tables will be the only saved tables after the building is finally wrecked by feet pigs. On that note, he said I still have a word to mention.

bees, tiger, one or three every picture, tracing of looking a tiger in a hole, no matter how fierce or risk these people were the wall not when before for Robert Kipling. The Chinese boys on an abutment Yang, you, who'd keep them, and proceeded to offer private conversations on the tiger and bear incident, which did nothing to help Kipling in the meantime. Pig tried to dig its grubby hoofs into my face as I tried to grab its hind legs from where the Billiard room. I pulled to the when were there for a moment's rest. Tracing ended, going the pressure a little, one and the other and one nothing into a tight corner. This was the first time a mosquito net had been used to trap a pig and a man. By the time we parted ways, Pig was still squealing. It has been about four months since Pig was moved back to the box. The Billiard room has been doing a roaring business. The other businesses are also prospering. The stars on by the Chinese boys and the numerous other spread with

Epilogue



Epilogue

Intimate Reflections

The Question of the Architectural Subject

‘What is your thesis about?’ This polite query has hung heavy over the entire duration of my own research. Yet, more interesting to me than the question are my answers. These answers have marked the passing of months, moods, obstacles, risks and passions. They are attempts – sometimes nuanced, other times clumsy – at translating intellectual and emotional energies into nuggets of architectural knowledge. I would usually say that I was investigating a colonial hotel’s architecture through its floral and animal associations. My response would usually be followed by both expressions of interest and confusion. Did I not say I was doing research in architecture? So, how are flora and fauna relevant? If my standard reply was to say, ‘I am studying a building’, then my more honest answer should have been, ‘I am interested in the flora and fauna of this space, so I decided to look at its architecture’.

This shift represents no small difference. It is a matter of epistemological hierarchy. It suggests where I am placed in relation to my architectural subject matter, and interrogates how this relationship configures the architectural subject. My second and more honest response admits that my architectural subject is much more complex than the in-depth examination of the architectural facts of the hotel itself. In this case, the architectural subject matter emerges out of an interest in the hotel’s relationship to its

flora and the fauna, and it implicates the reticent experiencing subject, that is to say, it involves me.

In this thesis, I advocate an architectural method which begins to flesh out these issues. I suggest that a reinvigorated architectural subject matter, which I called the *architecture of intimate encounter*, unfolds through a relational configuration between the experiencing subject – who may be a researcher, writer, critic, historian, theorist or occupant, for example – and her architectural object of study. This relational configuration installs the experiencing subject as central to the intimate encounter and integral to the constitution of the architectural subject. In the *Prologue*, I argued for the importance of factoring in the experiencing subject's conscious 'self-interest',¹ that is, her efforts at understanding how she knows and relates to her object of study, as part of the architectural epistemology of the intimate encounter. Thus, the architectural subject of the intimate encounter is always already a double subject, constituting the architectural object of study and the experiencing subject herself.

The adjective 'intimate' bears discussion here. In using the term 'intimate' I draw on what is personal but at the same time, and more importantly, negotiate how my personality has been manifested through relational and interpersonal patterns, which question how my own experiences and meanings are relationally positioned and continually redefined in reference to other subjects, spaces and times. I am an academic

¹ See Elspeth Probyn, "'Après le texte qui vient?": Ghosts in the (Missing) Text', in Marysia Lewandowska (ed.), *The Missing Text* (London: Chance Books, 1991), pp.101-16.; Susan Rubin Suleiman, 'Introduction: The Risk of Being Contemporary', in *Risking Who One Is: Encounters with Contemporary Art and Literature* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1994), pp.1-10; Nancy K. Miller, 'Changing the Subject: Authorship, Writing and the Reader', in *Subject to Change: Reading Feminist Writing* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), pp.102-21; Jane Rendell, *The Pursuit of Pleasure: Gender, Space and Architecture in Regency London* (London: Athlone, 2002), pp.2-3.

practising architectural research but I am also a trained architect, a teacher, a migrant, an animal-lover, a gardener, an aspiring yogini, a wife, a daughter, a child whose first words were a smattering of English mixed up with her mother tongue which had no written form, and a Straits-born Peranakan woman from a matriarchal culture. These are the things you should know about me. They are vividly present in my architectural interpretation of the Raffles Hotel although if I did not mention them, you may not have noticed the connections. In my view, they define variously a feminist viewpoint, a doubt towards prescriptive 'national identity', a suspicion towards wide-eyed claims of authentic 'native' knowledges, a passion for the situated and partial voice, and a commitment to reinstall the gendered, embodied and desiring experiencing subject as integral to the constitution of architectural subject matter.

Yet what I have chosen to examine in this hotel – the writer W. Somerset Maugham in the Palm Court and the visiting animals in the Billiard Room – are not things that are personal to me. They are part of the hotel's history, if not, its trivia. What I offer in this dissertation is a critical negotiation of my interest in Maugham and the animals played out through the architectural spaces of the Palm Court and the Billiard Room. Thus, the intimate encounter challenges the commonly held perception that the hotel is an historical architectural subject *a priori* by arguing for and devising a research itinerary that examines specific subjects, spaces and times which emerge from this experiencing subject's architectural encounter with two spaces in this hotel.

The intimate encounter also rubs against the finely honed edges of 'Architecture' as something, which is determined by the architect. I study the hotel because of my interest in Maugham in the Palm Court and the animals in the Billiard Room. In other words,

this architectural subject emerges through my encounter with Maugham and the animals. In this thesis, I have argued that the Palm Court and the Billiard Room unfold as architectural spaces of encounter primarily through these associations. This perspective does not discount the architect's contribution or undermine the necessity of the building itself. Rather, it attempts to understand the difference, and sometimes to reconcile the gap, between how an architectural space like the Raffles Hotel is actually perceived and how it is architecturally and ideally represented.

Architectural Spiders and Spiderwebs

I have suggested that the architecture of intimate encounter is played out conceptually through three key aspects. The first is the relational experiencing subject, described through the figure of the spider and her web. The second is an architectural interpretation that takes place in a 'time-out-of-joint', and the third, is the critical role of the intimate detail.

The figure of intimate encounter is the spider and her fragile web construction. This figure emphasizes the relational construction of the architectural subject, which implicitly includes the experiencing subject as an integral part of the architectural encounter. The spiderweb's configuration reflects the spider's inventiveness in spinning new webs of architectural relationships as well as allowing the particularities of the encountered space to manifest itself. The intimate encounter takes place in a time-out-of-joint such that the time and space of the experiencing subject is juxtaposed against a network of other

spatio-temporal contexts. Thus, while the subject matter encountered may be historical, the architectural interpretation I propose is not chronological but reflects the complex layering of subjects, spaces and times in a single architectural space, mediated by the self-interest of the experiencing subject.

My encounter with the Palm Court through Maugham critically reconsiders the writer's evocative but elusive notion of the 'Exotic East' and its 'fables'. It conceptually expands the architecture of this tropical garden through a rhizomatic network of spaces, which I suggest, constitute a metonymic web of the Palm Court interpreted through the relationship between its writer-occupant, his literary life and the fictions he produced. The proposed web which consists of a set of spaces grafted onto the Palm Court is neither situated in Maugham's time alone nor in the time of my encounter with him, but takes place in the overlap between these two spatio-temporal contexts, that is, Maugham's and mine.

Similarly, my interest in the animal anecdotes stem from trying to understand how my encounter with this material actively shapes my contemporary architectural understanding of the Billiard Room. The animal anecdotes are analyzed for their awkwardness in relation to architectural discourse and re-interpreted for their viscosity. The notion of the grotesque body, central to my reading of the Billiard Room, juxtaposes the time of these animal stories (records of the early twentieth century and more recent versions) and the time of my own reading of this material.

In both *Flora* and *Fauna*, it is the architectural space that stages the inquiry. Each architectural space demands a different process of knowing. In encountering these

spaces, I suggested that an investigation of the intimate detail – a key object that plays a significant part in the architectural experience but is not formally acknowledged as an architectural detail – enables the experiencing subject to conceptualize architectural concepts that are specific to the space investigated. Through an examination of the palm tree and the billiard table as intimate details, the discussion developed the floral plot of ‘grafting’ for the Palm Court and the animal plot of ‘overturning’ for the Billiard Room.

I have argued for the use of metonymy when encountering the Palm Court and metaphor when encountering the Billiard Room. There are several reasons for using these different yet associative modes of knowing. These associative processes embrace what is surplus to architectural knowledge by rehabilitating absent or repressed subjects. Metaphor and metonymy are, as literary theorist Nancy K. Miller observes, self-conscious ‘about their own processes of theorization; a self-consciousness that points to the fictional strategies inherent in all theory’.² In other words, these processes recognize the constructed and contingent character of the double architectural subject constituted by the experiencing subject and her architectural object of study, and seeks to critically understand how this relationship implicitly constructs architectural experiences and meanings.

For the Palm Court, I explore the repressed feminine through ‘grafting’, a concept of metonymic profusion suggested by the palm tree, and investigate floral nodes of feminine excess in Maugham’s Exotic Eastern fiction and his literary life, namely through the themes of intoxication, gossip and masculine self-definition. In the Billiard Room, the concept of ‘overturning’ informed by the billiard table suggests a metaphorical

² Nancy K. Miller, ‘Feminist Confessions: The Last Degrees Are the Hardest’, in *Getting Personal: Feminist Occasions and Other Autobiographical Acts* (New York: Routledge, 1991), pp.ix-xvii; here p.xii.

subversion of the colonial architectural subject. The animal is, I have argued, a metaphor for the grotesque and the feminine. By forefronting the animal in the architectural interpretation of the Billiard Room, I also attempt to reveal the reliance of this space on its repressed feminine foundations. In my interpretation of both spaces, I have taken a gendered position, that is, by reclaiming the repressed feminine in the gender-neutral space of the Palm Court and the commonly perceived masculine domain of the Billiard Room. This gendered interpretation contributes new architectural knowledge to this colonial architectural subject, whose emergent architectural history I have argued, implicitly revolves around a patriarchal model of knowledge.³

Significantly, the conjunction of 'flora' and 'fauna' in a tropical hotel is of no coincidence. Rather than focusing on their 'naturalness', I have tried to show instead how multivalent and abundant in cultural meanings these two aspects can be for architectural discourse in general, and in particular for the hotel as an architectural subject of intimate encounter. 'Flora' and 'fauna' can actively transform the static meanings concerning the natural, which also underlie the extant category of 'tropical architecture'.⁴

³ See *Empirical Contexts*, pp.99-109.

⁴ See *Empirical Contexts*, pp.109-16.

Transforming the Archive

This thesis remains a theoretical examination of the intimate encounter of the Palm Court and the Billiard Room, and does not aim to exhaustively cover the architectural history of the Raffles Hotel. However, one of the most difficult aspects of this research has been to understand and re-articulate my own position in relation to architectural history and theory. While I am interested in events and subjects that transpired in the past, the purpose of my research is to interrogate how this historical past is encountered in the contemporary present and how the intimate encounter shapes its architectural subject matter.

Two points which deal with the notion of the architectural archive and the evidence it contains are worth discussing here. First, in the case of this thesis, the legitimate architectural archive, which constitutes a set of jealously guarded architectural drawings, is less important than what is surplus to this architectural archive. This surplus material galvanizes my research. Escaping the limits of the vault, the hotel's fugitive 'archive' exists as pieces of texts, images, objects, rumours and ideas, which may or may not be traditionally related to architecture but are nevertheless sources central to this experiencing subject's intimate encounter. As such, the notion of 'architectural evidence' is critically expanded in this thesis to include for example, Maugham's biographical details, popular fiction, knowledge about tropical plants and animals, gossip and children's stories.

Second, the common notion of the 'primary source' is reversed since the 'primary source' is considered in this thesis to constitute what is fundamentally accessible, and *primary to*,

the intimate encounter rather than what is previously unseen or locked away. As such, a contemporary book may be a primary source, while an historical document, which is consulted as a result of one's interest in what is discussed in the book, may constitute a 'secondary source'. Jacques Derrida has argued that the archive 'takes place' through a 'privileged topology', that is, it gains its authority through the force of an institution.⁵ In this respect, the fugitive archive of an intimate encounter inevitably finds itself outside of, and contesting this privileged topology since it is not 'deposited ... on a stable substrate, and at the disposition of a legitimate hermeneutic authority',⁶ but is instead subject to the vicissitudes of the intimate encounter, which involves a juxtaposition of different subjects, spaces, times and experiences.

But, there is also a downside to this situation. As the hotel in question is a private concern, and its 'archive' and primary 'evidence' are not institutionalized, the available knowledge is consequently ephemeral and patchy. If the coverage of this thesis tends to concentrate on some issues to the neglect of others, it also reflects the unevenness of the emphasis in existing Southeast Asian architectural research and may be used as an indicator of where future research is needed in this region. Notably, perhaps because of the nature of its private archive compounded by the fact that existing Southeast Asian architectural research has tended to focus on architectural types, which reflect either political agendas and/or national identities, there is as yet, no architectural discourse which critically takes up the hotel as its subject matter. This thesis moves towards addressing this lack.

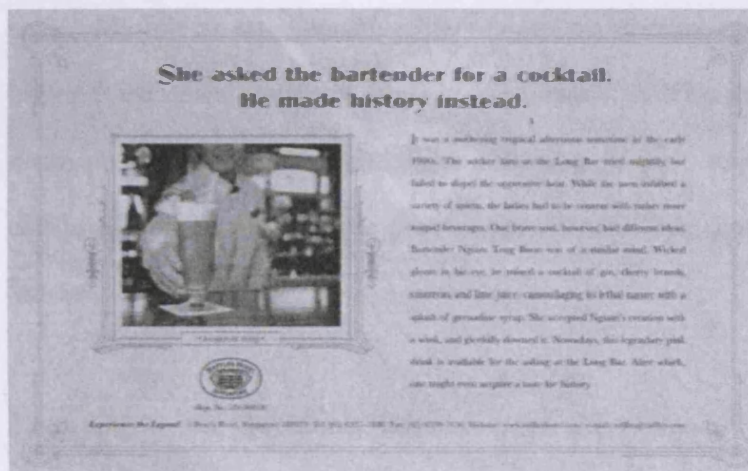
⁵ Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), pp.1-3.

⁶ Derrida, *Archive Fever*, p.3.

The emergent architectural history, which I discussed in *Empirical Contexts* has been constructed in the last two decades to respond to the hotel's new status as a National Monument since 1987. I have argued that this history emphasizes a national agenda and follows a patriarchal epistemological model, which excludes subjects that are central to an intimate encounter. In my research, I suggest that the cultural and social aspects of the region, which are unyoked to regionalist and/or nationalist agendas such as tropical flora and fauna in this case, constitute rich material for new architectural research.

I have constructed two sets of spiderwritings. In *Flora*, I speculate on the transgressive nature of feminine excess through the construction of a collection of pressed paper flower and leaves found in the Palm Court and imprinted with words from Maugham's fiction, and a set of fictional letters allegedly sent to Pablo Neruda from his Burmese muse and mistress, a woman named 'Josie Bliss' who haunts Neruda's poetry and stands for the poet's ambivalence towards the 'Exotic East'. In *Fauna*, I investigate the notions of architectural form and functionality associated with the architectural model through a collection of model billiard tables, and explore the animal stories' through the fictional memoirs of the *jagah*. While these spiderwritings complement the academic argument, I also consider them as fugitive archives of the Palm Court and the Billiard Room, which are revealed through an intimate encounter.

*'She asked the bartender for a cocktail. He made history instead'*⁷



4.0.1 'Cocktails and History'.

This wonderful line comes from one of the hotel's contemporary advertisements. (Fig.4.0.1) It tells how the legendary drink, the 'Singapore Sling', was invented in the Long Bar in the early 1900s by the bartender Ngiam Tong Boon for a brave female guest who 'accepted Ngiam's creation with a wink, and gleefully downed it'. For me, it is an anecdote, which traces the feminine subject's critical role in shaping a history that has been portrayed primarily as patriarchal.

I started my research by worrying that this masculine colonial monument would dull my feminist sensibilities. I was certain that I would be able to offer no new perspectives concerning this space, just as it would not reward my engagement. I have, thankfully, been proven wrong in both assumptions. Through this masculine construct, I have had to re-evaluate what being a contemporary feminist architectural thinker involves and to

⁷ Advertisement from 'How to Spend It', supplement in *The Financial Times*, March 2006. I am grateful to Barbara Penner for bringing this advertisement to my attention.

creatively re-envision how familiar strategies may be put to work in a situation where masculine discourse is the only audible voice. This situation has sharpened my critical voice. My role as experiencing subject makes me discursively accountable, or to quote Miller, 'One's own body can constitute an internal limit on discursive irresponsibility, a brake on rhetorical spinning'.⁸ This reflexive position stops me from conveniently collapsing how I know into the abstract race-gender-class category of 'other women' or 'others'.

Returning to the question: 'What is your thesis about?' It is about intimately encountering the architectural spaces of the Raffles Hotel through its floral and animal associations. It is also about intimately encountering oneself as part of the architectural subject, spinning new webs of experiences and meanings in locations both architectural and inter-personal, and unfolding an architecture of intimate encounter.

⁸ Miller, 'Feminist Confessions', p.xiii.

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Materials on the Raffles Hotel

The Raffles Hotel Archive and Museum

The hotel's archive contains unindexed material dating from the late nineteenth century to the early 1990s. This holding includes old maps, postcards, posters, hand bills and advertisements, menus, luggage labels, tourist brochures, photographs, souvenirs, correspondence, newspaper clippings, illustrations, storybooks by authors who have stayed in the hotel and tropical travel paraphernalia. Some of this material is exhibited in the Raffles Hotel Museum (3rd Floor, Bras Basah New Wing). A selection of this archive is featured in the hotel's recent monographs by Gretchen Liu (see 'Published Texts and Monographs' below). The museum's exhibits focus on the history of the hotel and the general travel scene in colonial Asia between 1880-1939.

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